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INDIA bloc protests for Kejri at Ramlila Maidan

Kejri gets support at the spot where he started political career

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Top INDIA bloc leaders gathered at the Ramlila Maidan here on Sunday to express solidarity with arrested Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, and urged people to vote out BJP in Lok Sabha polls to "save democracy and the Constitution".

The leaders who were on the stage at the 'Loktantra Bachao' (save democracy) rally included Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, former presidents Sonia and Rahul Gandhi; NCP's Sharad Yadav, NC leader Farooq Abdullah, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray; Left leaders Sitaram Yechury, D Raja, Dipankar Bhattacharya; Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav; RJD's Tejashwi Yadav and TMC's Derek O'Brien.

Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal and JMM leader Hemant Soren's wife Kalpana Soren were also addressed the gathering, castigating the Central government over the arrest of their husbands in corruption cases. Sunita read out a letter from her husband which she said he sent from the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) custody.

Thackeray alleged the country has become an "autocracy" under the Modi government, and appealed to the people to throw BJP out of power.

INDIA bloc leaders came together at a 'Loktantra Bachao' rally at the Ramlila ground in Delhi on Sunday PHOTO: PTI

- Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal and JMM leader Hemant Soren's wife Kalpana Soren were also addressed the gathering, castigating the Central government

"We are not here for an election campaign, we are here to save democracy... what kind of government is this, you make allegations and send people to jail," he said.

"Two of our sisters are fighting, how can the brother stay behind? So we are here for our sisters, Kalpana ji and Sunita ji. Not just we, the whole country is with you," he said.

Thackeray accused BJP of misusing ED, CBI and Income Tax Department, and said they should declare that these three agencies are their allies.

AAP Delhi state convener Gopal Rai said the Ramlila Maidan is a historic place which has changed the country's history several times. "Whenever a crisis has arisen in the country, a voice of change has echoed from here." "If they (BJP) win the Lok Sabha elections, the country will face consequences. This is a do or die situation for all of us," he said at the rally.

Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely said the Lok Sabha elections will decide the future of coming generations and what kind of a democracy they live in.

—PTI

Oppn rallies not for democracy, but 1 family: BJP

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

BJP on Sunday slammed the Opposition INDIA bloc's rally at Ramlila Ground here, saying it was not a "save democracy" meeting as projected but a "save family" and "hide corruption" rally.

The ruling party also hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his "match-fixing" accusation against Prime Minister Narendra Modi as it cited the decision of the then Indira Gandhi government in 1974 to hand over Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka to accuse the Congress of compromising the interests of Addressing a press conference here, BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla slammed the Congress over Gandhi's claim that the entire country will be on fire if the BJP returns to power as it seems to amend the Constitution. Another BJP spokesperson and Rajya Sabha member, Sudhanshu Trivedi, attacked the opposition rally as its leaders began gathering at the famous Ramlila Ground here in a show of unity to galvanise people's support amid investigation agencies' action against several constituents of the INDIA bloc. —PTI

TOTAL TAX RISES TO ₹3567 CR

Cong gets fresh I-T notice of over ₹1,745 crore

The tax authorities have already withdrawn Rs 135 crore PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

In mounting trouble for Congress, sources in the party said it has received fresh notices from Income Tax department, raising a tax demand of Rs 1,745 crore for the assessment years 2014-15 to 2016-17.

With this latest notice, Income Tax department has raised a total demand of Rs 3,567 crore from Congress. The fresh tax notices relate to 2014-15 (Rs 663 crore), 2015-16 (around Rs 664 crore) and 2016-17 (around Rs 417 crore). The authorities have ended the tax exemption available to political parties and have taxed the party for the entire collections. Congress has also been taxed for "third-party entries" made in diaries seized from some of its leaders by probe agencies during raids. The main Opposition party on Friday said that it has received notices from I-T department, asking it to pay around Rs 1,823 crore. The tax authorities have already withdrawn Rs 135 crore from the party's accounts for a tax demand relating to previous years.

Congress has moved the court against the Rs 135-crore tax demand and the case is likely to come up before Supreme Court on Monday. The party has failed to get any relief from High Court of Income Tax Appellate Tribunal in this regard. Congress leaders have contended that similar third-party entries naming BJP leaders in other diaries have not been levied any tax.

They have accused BJP of indulging in "tax terrorism" and financially crippling the principal Opposition party during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. It has also complained to Election Commission in this regard and urged it to maintain a level playing field. —PTI

4 killed as storm wreaks havoc in WB's Jalpaiguri

JALPAIGURI, 31 MARCH

Four people died and over 100 were injured as a "sudden" storm wreaked havoc in parts of Jalpaiguri district in northern West Bengal on Sunday, officials said Several hutments and houses were damaged, trees uprooted and electric poles came crushing down as strong winds accompanied by hail struck most parts of the district headquarters town and many areas of neighbouring Mainaguri, they said. Among the most affected areas were Rajarhat, Barnish, Bakali, Jorpakdi, Madhabdanga and Saptibari, the officials said, adding that several acres of agricultural lands and crops suffered damages. The deceased were identified as Dijendra Narayan Sarkar, 52, Anima Burman, 45, Jagen Roy, 72, and Samar Roy, 64. "Many pedestrians were injured by hail. The disaster response team has been deployed and helpdesks set up," a senior official of Jalpaiguri district said. Dhupguri MLA Nirmal Chandra Roy told PTI that several people have been admitted to hospital with injuries. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has cancelled her scheduled programmes and will head to Jalpaiguri later on Sunday, TMC sources said. Governor CV Ananda Bose will also be leaving for Jalpaiguri on Monday to visit the affected areas, Raj Bhavan officials said. "District administration will provide compensation to next of kin in the case of the deaths, and the injured as per rules and following the MCC," she added. —PTI

EASTER CELEBRATION

Children enjoy egg-shaped chocolates after Easter prayer, at St Andrew's Church in Bengaluru on Sunday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Man-animal conflict kills one every week in K'taka

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

- More than 600 people have lost their lives due to attacks by wild animals, majority of them being from elephants, over the last decade

One person on average gets killed in human-animal conflict every week in Karnataka, reveals official data. According to forest department, such conflicts are mostly reported in the southern part of the State starting from Bannerghatta, Chama rajanagara, Mysuru, Kodagu and Hassan to Chikkamagaluru belt.

More than 600 people have lost their lives due to attacks by wild animals, majority of them being from elephants, over the last decade, officials said. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has termed such conflicts as a "blazing issue" before his government.

According to the data shared by the forest department, 618 people have died in human-animal conflict in Karnataka between 2010-11 and 2023-24 (up to March six this year). These include 416 deaths from attacks by elephants, 38 by leopards, 36 by bears/sloth bears, 34 by tigers, and 32 by wild boars. Karnataka has an estimated 6,400 elephants, he said and out of these, may be around 350 are coming out of the forests, mostly it's the young tuskers in the age group of 18-30. Elaborating on the types of man-elephant conflicts, he said elephants which come to eat cash crops being grown just outside the forest area hurriedly return before the first ray of sun arrives and most of these conflict occurs when they are rushing back.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Subhash K Malkhede, said: "Not just elephants, we are also in conflict with tigers, leopards and sloth bears." —PTI

Massive fire engulfs Kadugodi forest in Karnataka

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

A large fire broke out in Bengaluru's Kadugodi forest on Sunday, causing chaos and respiratory issues in nearby areas. Thick smoke was said to spread from the burning forest, which sits opposite the Information Technology Park Limited (ITPL).

The fire reportedly started around 2pm and quickly spread due to the conditions created by dry leaves and shrubs that covered the area. Fire officials believe these leaves fell during the recent spring season and the intense heat may have triggered the fire.

The fire department is battling the fire with three fire engines deployed from nearby Sarjapur, Mahadevpura, and Whitefield. Given the fire's vast scale, authorities have requested assistance from Indian Air Force as well.

While no casualties have been reported, residents struggled to breathe due to the thick smoke.

The officials urged the residents to stay indoors and avoid the affected area.

In another incident, a fire broke out near Rajiv Gandhi Hospital in Siddapura Sunday afternoon, scorching trees due to the intense heat. Firefighters responded swiftly, dispatching one fire engine to extinguish the blaze. The incident, was reported at around 1pm, no casualties reported.

Fire officials urged the residents to be cautious, especially during the dry season, as such fires can spread rapidly.

—Salar News/PTI

OLDEST ATP CHAMPION

Bopanna-Ebden clinch Miami Open title

MIAMI, 31 MARCH

Ace Indian tennis player Rohan Bopanna rewrote his own record to continue to be the oldest ATP Masters 1000 champion as he and his Australian partner Matt Ebden clinched the men's doubles crown at the Miami Open here.

Continuing their fine run this year, Bopanna, 44 and Ebden fought back from a set down to pull off an exhilarating 6-7(3), 6-3, 10-6 win over Crotia's Ivan Dodig and American Austin Krajicek at the Hard Rock Stadium on Saturday. With the win, Bopanna surpassed his record created last year when he won the Indian Wells title at the age of 43, and also reclaimed the top spot in the doubles ranking. "It's amazing. As long as you are doing well in these big events, it's what we play for," Bopanna said after the win. "I want to do well in the Masters 1000s and the Grand Slams. It's good to keep that record going and keep giving everyone else a run for their money," added Bopanna, who won his maiden doubles Grand Slam title at the Australian Open earlier this year.

This was Bopanna's 14th ATP Masters 1000 final. Overall, it was the veteran Indian player's 63rd ATP Tour level final and 26th doubles title. Bopanna also achieved a rare feat as he became the second Indian after Leander Paes to reach the final of all nine ATP Masters events.

Bopanna and Ebden, the top seeds for the tournament, tapped into their deep reservoir of experience to fetch the final six points of the summit clash. They had three set points on serve at 6-5 in the opening set but their second-seeded opponents warded off all three to force a tiebreaker before taking a 1-0 lead.

"It's tough. These guys, they fight back in tough moments," said Ebden. "Last time we played them it was similar, it's a bit of a see-saw. They return so well, make so many balls and we missed one or two shots when we were up [at the end of] the first set. They played a great tie-break, and then we just reset."

Bopanna and Ebden then staged a comeback as they broke their opponent early in the second set which helped them level the game. The tie-breaker was also fought on an even keel with the reigning Australian Open champions emerging victorious. —PTI

Ageless Bopanna

- 1 Grand Slam Title
- 6 ATP 1000 Titles
- 5 ATP 500 Titles
- 14 ATP 250 Titles

Matthew Ebden of Australia and Rohan Bopanna of India pose with the championship trophy after their Men's Doubles Final match during the 2024 Miami Open at Melbourne Park in Hard Rock Stadium. Bopanna rewrote his own record to continue to be the oldest ATP Masters 1000 champion PHOTO: X/MIAMI OPEN

PHOTO: PTI

Zomato gets GST demand order of Rs 23.26 cr

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Zomato, an online food delivery platform has disclosed the tax demand received by the State tax authorities of Rs 23.6 crore of penalty. The company stated on Sunday that it intends to file an appeal against the order, believing it has a strong case on merits. The notice, related to the audit of the company's GST returns and accounts for the fiscal year 2018-19, cited excess availment of input tax credit and short payment of GST. The demand order pertains to alleged excess availment of input tax credit and interest penalty. Zomato noted that it had responded to the show cause notice with relevant documents and legal precedents, but the authorities seemingly did not consider this while issuing the order. Zomato added that it is confident in defending the matter before the appellate authority and does not anticipate any financial impact from the incident. This development comes shortly after Zomato received a tax notice from the Deputy Commissioner of State Tax in Gujarat earlier this month. For the fiscal year 2018-19, Zomato disclosed receiving an order demanding GST amounting to Rs 4,11,68,604, along with applicable interest and penalty totalling Rs 8,57,77,696. The company noted discrepancies in the authorities' assessment while issuing the order.

—Salar News

KPSC files FIR in connection with missing file

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

The Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPS) filed a complaint with Vidhana Soudha police that the recruitment selection list of junior engineers in the office of the KPSC has gone missing. The examination was held on 24 September, 2016 for the recruitment of Junior Engineers to the Karnataka Slum Development Board. Regarding the additional selection list published on 22 November 2018, a job aspirant HD Vivekananda approached the High Court. Later, as per the Court orders, the selection list was made in KPSC Gopya Branch-3. The file was received in the Secretary's private branch on 22 January of this year. After that, the file went missing,the complaint mentioned. A police officer informed that the CCTV visuals are being checked regarding the incident.

—Salar News

CM secretaries' fake letter created; case booked

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Vidhana Soudha police has registered two separate cases on circulation of fraudulent documents. A counterfeit order purportedly issued by the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Secretaries, the perpetrators have disseminated fake order copies to departments such as Finance and Health and Family Welfare, under the guise of authenticity. Upon verification, it was revealed that these documents were indeed fabricated. Another attempt involved fraudulent contract orders purportedly issued by the Wakf Board Secretary. The accused sought to secure contracts by forging government orders, including one purportedly issued by the Minority Welfare Secretary for the development of minority colony infrastructure in Doddaballapur Assembly constituency. Additionally, a fake order, falsely attributing a four crore contract to the Waqf Board Secretary Nagaraj, had come light. The rapid increase in counterfeit government orders has become a growing concern, with fraudulent documents bearing the names of senior government officials circulating rampantly.

—Salar News

Battle of Mysuru: It's Siddaramaiah vs scion

The stakes are high for CM as well as royal family

MYSURU, 31 MARCH

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah hasn't entered the electoral contest here but the battle for Mysuru Lok Sabha seat is certainly seen as one between him and scion of the erstwhile royal family.

For four days from 24 March, Siddaramaiah camped in Mysuru -- his home district -- personally overseeing the poll preparations of the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

Springing a surprise, BJP fielded the scion of the erstwhile Mysuru royal family Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, replacing MP Pratap Simha. Congress Karnataka unit spokesperson M Lakshmana is the party candidate with some leaders in the outfit projecting the electoral contest as 'Common man versus Raja (king)'.

Siddaramaiah held several rounds of meetings with the party office-bearers in various Assembly constituencies

Mysuru royal family Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar
PHOTO: PTI

under Mysuru Lok Sabha segment and issued several instructions to them. "The pressure on Siddaramaiah is quite palpable as he has to demonstrate his hold among masses in the upcoming Lok Sabha constituency in Karnataka and more so in Mysuru," a political analyst said.

Siddaramaiah represents Varuna in Mysuru district in the legislative assembly. The 'Battle of Mysuru' isn't an easy one -- it's a 'battle royale' where the stakes are high for Chief Minister as well as the Mysuru royal family.

- The pressure on Siddaramaiah is quite palpable as he has to demonstrate his hold among masses in the upcoming Lok Sabha constituency in Karnataka and more so in Mysuru

Lakshmana is from Vokkaliga (farming) community, which dominates Mysuru. After his candidature was announced, he said the Congress has given a befitting reply to BJP by giving ticket to him because the opposition party in the State often alleged that Siddaramaiah was anti-Vokkaliga.

Lakshmana's Vokkaliga card was aimed at subtly sending across a message to his community that BJP denied ticket to Pratap Simha, a Vokkaliga, and preferred Wadiyar from erstwhile royal family. On Congress' slogan of 'Common man versus Raja', Wadiyar said in democratic India no one is king and everyone is equal in the eyes of law.

When reporters asked recently whether Mysuru seat was a prestige issue for him, the Chief Minister said all 28 Lok Sabha seats are a prestige issue for him. However, sources close to him hint that Siddaramaiah is leaving no stone unturned and pulling out all stops in his home turf.

"It indeed is a prestige issue for him given the high stakes for him. It's in a way like perform or perish for him," a Congress insider told PTI.

—PTI

ROADSHOW ON

Shah in K'taka as party workers are sparring: DKS

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday said Union Home Minister Amit Shah is holding a roadshow at Channapatna in the Bangalore Rural Lok Sabha segment, as workers of BJP and JD(S), who are fighting the polls in alliance, are not united there. Shivakumar's brother and sitting MP DK Suresh is the Congress candidate in Bangalore Rural, while the BJP has fielded noted cardiologist CN Manjunath, who is the son-in-law of JD(S) patriarch and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, on its ticket.

Shivakumar said that Shah will commence his campaign in Karnataka on Tuesday. He explained, "The reason for selecting Channapatna is because of the lack of unity between BJP and JD(S) in the region.

Workers from both parties have been engaged in constant conflicts, which was evident during the local body polls." Hitting out at BJP- JD(S) alliance, Shivakumar noted that the joint worker's meetings have not yet been held by them till now.

"Why didn't they hold both parties' joint workers' meetings till now? Just because the leaders have come together will the workers come together,? Shivakumar said.

In response to Kumaraswamy's accusations of backstabbing and political poisoning, Shivakumar said, "Kumaraswamy is now seeking alliances with BJP leaders, who once destabilised his government (Congress-JD(S) coalition government). BJP leaders Yediyurappa, Ashoka, and Ashwath Narayan, is now embracing them, people will have to decide."

—Salar News with PTI

BJP relies on BSY factor in K'taka

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

BJP veteran BS Yediyurappa is out of power and electoral politics for sure, but his clout in the party's affairs in Karnataka remains undiminished as its central leadership seems to be once again falling back on this seasoned oarsman to deliver in the coming Lok Sabha polls.

Whether it is a selection of candidates or quelling dissidence in multiple constituencies, the party's 81-year-old central election committee member is seen to be a "man of the season."

Stakes are indeed high for the BJP Parliamentary Board member as he will have to ensure that his son BY Vijayendra consolidates his

BJP veteran BS Yediyurappa
PHOTO: PTI

position as the party's State President and silences critics who have questioned his selection for the post ignoring the claims of experienced hands.

The octogenarian, who has already announced his retirement from electoral politics, is seeking to be put on the pedestal by BJP's central leaders, making him a key poll mascot in the state, along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

It's now quite evident from BJP's scheme of things that the party is keen on leveraging the "Yediyurappa factor" and putting him up as the "poster boy" to reap rich electoral dividends.

No less than Modi himself had lavish praise for Yediyurappa in his home district of Shivamogga during his public meeting earlier this month. Ahead of assembly polls, Yediyurappa announced retirement from electoral politics. BJP had swept the 2019 general elections to Lok Sabha, bagging 25 of the total 28 seats in the State, while an independent backed by the party had also emerged victorious.

—PTI

PROTEST FOR KEJRIWAL

Congress candidate for Bengaluru Central Mansoor Ali Khan with members of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) protests against the Central government over the arrest of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal by Enforcement Directorate (ED) in an excise scam, at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Sunday
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Plaint against DyCM for violating MCC

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

BJP State unit on Sunday filed a complaint to the State Chief Election Commissioner against Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday for violation of Code of Conduct.

Shivakumar held a party joining ceremony for JD(S) women wing member Najma Naseer Chikkanerale in Vidhana Soudha. In the complaint, BJP said that Shivakumar knew that the Ministers and MLAs of the state are prohibited from using government offices for party activities and yet Shivakumar held the function in his office which violated the Code of Conduct. The plea said that despite this happening under the watch of the Chief Secretary of the state, Rajneesh Goyal, his apparent inaction to take any action is alarming.

"As Lok Sabha elections have been announced, nomination papers have already started. But there is a lack of enforcement of the election code of conduct by the government officials. It is said that party activities are still going on in the offices of several ruling party MLAs," said BJP.

BJP leaders also pointed out that the ministers are holding press conferences from Vikasa Soudha. BJP demanded the Election Commission to immediately close the offices of the Ministers. The petition said that the Ministers and MLAs should be banned from carrying out any political activity in government buildings and that strict action should be taken against the officials who are allowed beyond the rules.

—Salar News

Shivakumar held joining ceremony for Najma Naseer
PHOTO: PTI

ARM HOLDERS TO SURRENDER WEAPONS IN CHIKKAMAGALURU

C'MAGALUR, 31 MARCH

Known for its stunning landscapes and rich coffee estates, Chikkamagalur district boasts the highest number of licensed firearms in the region, totalling over 10,000.

However, with Lok Sabha elections on the horizon, the district police department has taken proactive measures to ensure a safe and secure electoral process.

Residents have been directed to surrender their firearms to the respective police stations within a seven-day period. This directive comes as part of the election code of conduct enforcement, aimed at maintaining law and order during the electoral proceedings.

A screening committee has been established to oversee the surrender process, providing an avenue for individuals who feel threatened or require firearm possession for personal safety to submit applications.

District Superintendent of Police Vikram Amate highlighted the significance of this initiative against the backdrop of the impending elections. With a significant number of licensed firearms in the district, particularly in hilly areas, single houses, and coffee estates, individuals with licenses obtained under perceived life-threatening circumstances have been urged to comply with the surrender directive.

—Salar News

Cong could compromise for Kolar: Muniyappa

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Senior Congress leader KH Muniyappa on Sunday said the party should have found a compromise formula and chosen a local to contest from Kolar seat in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Muniyappa, who is seemingly upset after his son-in-law was denied a ticket from Kolar, claimed that the two factions led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM and State Congress President DK Shivakumar were unable to resolve their differences and hence selected a "third person" to contest from the seat.

Speaking to reporters, he claimed that such differences were there in several constituencies and efforts were made by the leadership to resolve them, but could not be done in Kolar.

KH Muniyappa
PHOTO: ANI

"I tried to convince them to give (Chikka Peddanna) an opportunity and that I will ensure victory, but they couldn't. KC Venugopal and Randeep Singh Surjewala (AICC General Secretaries) had contacted me...but, no one could resolve the differences.

Congress yesterday announced a 'neutral' candidate, KV Gowtham, for the segment sending out a message to the two factions of the Kolar Congress--one led by Muniyappa, and another by former Speaker Ramesh Kumar-- vying for supremacy in the district.

Meanwhile, Shivakumar said that the dissidence in Kolar unit of the party has been resolved and all leaders in the district including Muniyappa, Ramesh Kumar and other legislators have resolved to ensure the party's victory. "You will see that they will together ensure Congress' victory," he added.

—PTI

IT officials serve notice to cooker company

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

The Income Tax (IT) department officials have issued a notice to a pressure cooker manufacturing company located in Harohalli in Ramanagara taluk. The department said that the Congress candidate DK Suresh is luring voters by providing cookers. The company has seven inventory centres in the Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha constituency. The IT officials have asked to provide the details of the wholesale buyers and the number of cookers manufactured for the past few months. Bengaluru office has also been instructed to attend the hearing. The action of IT officials came after former CM H D Kumara Swamy made allegations against Suresh. He also claimed that Suresh was distributing money.

—Salar News

Farmer pumps water from own well into dry river

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Amidst a severe drought in Karnataka's Haveri district, 50-year-old farmer Bhuvaneshwar Shidlapur took a remarkable step in pumping water from his own bore well into River Varada, prioritising the needs of the ecosystem over his crops.

He owns 30-acre land where he grows sugarcane, maize, arecanut, and vegetables.

He has three borewells of which two are used for his crops, and the third for livestock and wildlife.

Haveri hasn't seen a drought this harsh in 25 years, according to Shidlapur. The drying of the Varada, a tributary of the Tungabhadra River, and other water sources compelled him to act. With the riverbed exposed, Shidlapur observed the plight of livestock and birds. He devised a plan to channel borewell water into the river, reviving a lifeline for the parched animals. The partially refilled riverbed has attracted a large number of birds and creatures seeking to quench their thirst.

Taking his initiative a step further, Shidlapur has requested the Deputy Commissioner to extend the daily power supply from six hours to 24 hours. This would allow him to pump water continuously, benefiting the wildlife throughout the day.

—Salar News

WATER CRISIS

City to use treated water for construction

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

The Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) on Sunday announced a new initiative to promote the use of treated water in construction projects. Partnering with Bangalore Apartment Federation (BAF) and CREDAI, the programme aims to reduce pressure on groundwater. Chairman of BWSSB, Dr Ram Prasath Manohar said that the treated water supply will begin on Tuesday.

Treated water will be sourced from both Jalamandali's wastewater treatment plant and private Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) with permission to sell their surplus. Separate pipelines will be installed to deliver treated water within a 500-metre radius of the Jalamandali plant, ensuring consistent supply for large-scale construction projects. By encouraging the use of treated water, the initiative aims to significantly reduce reliance on borewells and tankers, thereby alleviating pressure on Bengaluru's groundwater resources.

PHOTO: ANI

Excess treated water from apartments can be sold to consumers through the app "Eco Water Friendly Up" which is facilitated by BWSSB. This benefits both the apartment owners and construction companies. BWSSB also anticipates a rise in demand for treated water (already at 62 lakh litres) and expects increased revenue growth through sales.

The first phase of the initiative focuses on supplying treated water within a 5-kilometre radius of private and Jalamandali STPs. Delivery options include pipelines and tankers. To address concerns about the quality of the treated water, BWSSB has partnered with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) for independent certification. Consumers can also book treated water for construction needs through the app.

These initiatives present a multi-pronged approach to water management in Bengaluru. It promotes environmental sustainability, creates a marketplace for treated water, and offers BWSSB a new revenue stream. The partnership with IISc paves the way for a more sustainable construction industry in the City.

—Salar News

2 Gujarat BJP groups 'clash' over ticket distribution

AMRELI, 31 MARCH

Two groups in BJP allegedly clashed over the selection of Bharat Sutariya as the candidate from Amreli Lok Sabha seat in Gujarat after a meeting organised here to resolve the issue of differences between them over his nomination. The incident took place on Saturday night after the meeting was organised here under the leadership of former state cabinet minister and BJP's cluster in-charge for Amreli Bhupendra Chudasama, as per some party members. No police complaint has been filed so far in connection with the incident. Chudasama said there was no discontent and that Sutariya will remain BJP's candidate from Amreli. Some video clips showed a few injured party members lying on beds in a hospital, where a large number of the party workers had gathered, after the clash. *—PTI*

Cars pelted with stones during BJP meeting in UP

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 31 MARCH

Some people pelted stones and damaged several cars during an election rally in support of BJP's Lok Sabha candidate and Union minister Sanjeev Balyan in Khatauli area of Muzaffarnagar district, police said on Sunday. Balyan was addressing an election meeting when the cars parked in the vicinity were damaged. Additional Superintendent of Police (city) Satyanarayan Prajapat said the election rally of Balyan was underway in Madhkarimpur village on Saturday night when some unruly elements threw stones at several vehicles, breaking their window panes. The attackers also raised slogans, Prajapat said, adding that a search is on to nab the accused and additional police force has been deployed in the village. *—PTI*

BRS leader Srihari deserts party, joins Cong

HYDERABAD, 31 MARCH

BRS in Telangana suffered another jolt as its sitting MLA and former minister Kadiam Srihari and his daughter Kadiam Kavya on Sunday joined Congress in the presence of Chief Minister and TPCC President A Revanth Reddy. Congress leaders have earlier invited Srihari to join the party. For various reasons, people are moving away from BRS. So, to serve the people and to do something for the constituency, he will take a call (on joining the Congress party), Srihari had said. Kavya, who was BRS candidate from Warangal, also announced her decision to opt out citing recent allegations of corruption and phone tapping against the previous K Chandrasekhar Rao-led regime. The allegations have lowered the party's prestige, she had said. *—PTI*

MP minister's son booked for assaulting couple

BHOPAL, 31 MARCH

A case has been registered against the son of a Madhya Pradesh Minister for allegedly assaulting a restaurant owner and his wife, an official said on Sunday. In a related matter, four cops were suspended after the accused, Abhigyan Patel, alleged that he and his friends were manhandled by policemen. Patel aged around 30, is the son of Madhya Pradesh Minister of State for Health Narendra Shivaji Patel. According to the police, Patel, who was on a four-wheeler, had a tiff with a journalist riding a two-wheeler at Trilanga crossing in the city around 8 pm on Saturday. He allegedly assaulted the journalist, prompting the owner of a nearby restaurant and his wife to intervene. Patel allegedly thrashed them too, the official said citing the FIR against the minister's son. When the victims reached the Shahpura police station to file complaints, Patel and his friends arrived there as well and allegedly kicked up a ruckus. *—PTI*

Congress gave away Katchatheevu: PM

He accuses Cong of weakening India's interests

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

BJP is hopeful that the issue will come handy to its efforts to gain political traction *PHOTO: PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday cited a media report to assert that new facts reveal that Congress "callously" gave away Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka.

"Eye opening and startling! New facts reveal how Congress callously gave away Katchatheevu. This has angered every Indian and reaffirmed in people's minds- we can't ever trust Congress," he said on X, sharing the report.

Modi added, "Weakening India's unity, integrity and interests has been Congress' way of working for 75 years and counting."

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also took a swipe at Congress, saying these facts should concern every citizen.

The island was with India till 1975, he said. Tamil Nadu fishermen used to go there earlier but the agreement India signed with Lanka under the Indira Gandhi government barred them from doing so, he added.

Unfortunately, neither DMK nor Congress is raising the issue but Modi is due to his commitment to the issues pertaining to the country and its people, he said.

BJP is hopeful that the issue will come handy to its efforts to gain political traction in the Dravidian territory as it gears up for the Lok Sabha polls, more so as it involves the neighbouring Sri Lanka whose treatment of its Tamilian citizens has long been a charged political issue in the state.

The report is based on a RTI reply Tamil Nadu BJP President K Annamalai received on the decision of the then Indira Gandhi government in 1974 to hand over the territory in Palk Strait to the neighbouring country.

The report also cites first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's comments on the issue, a source of dispute between India and Lanka, that he would have no hesitation in giving up claims on the island.

In a dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Trivedi asked as to why he is keeping mum on the issue. *—PTI*

Congress hits back at 'desperate' Modi

Kharge questions PM on clean chit to China

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Kharge also questioned the government's foreign policy with regard to India's neighbours including Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives *PHOTO: PTI*

Hitting back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his charge that Indira Gandhi gave away Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka, Congress Chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday asked why he did not take steps to get it back during his 10-year rule and alleged that raising the "sensitive" issue ahead of elections shows his "desperation".

He also questioned why the Prime Minister gave a "clean chit" to China after 20 bravehearts made supreme sacrifice in the Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh.

Kharge said that Katchatheevu island was given to Sri Lanka as part of a friendly agreement in 1974 and reminded the Modi government that it too had undertaken a similar "friendly gesture" towards Bangladesh on exchange of border enclaves.

"Pradhan Mantri Narendra Modi ji, You have suddenly woken up to the issues of territorial integrity and national security in your 10th year of misrule. Perhaps, elections are the trigger. Your desperation is palpable," he said in a post on X.

He also alleged, "Under your Government, in a friendly gesture, 111 enclaves from India were transferred to Bangladesh, and 55 enclaves came to India."

In 1974, he said, a similar agreement, based on a friendly gesture, was initiated with another country - Sri Lanka on Katchatheevu."On the eve of elections in Tamil Nadu, you are raising this sensitive issue, but your own Government's Attorney General, Shri Mukul Rohtagi in 2014 told the following to the Supreme Court - 'Katchatheevu went to Sri Lanka by an agreement in 1974'¦ How can it be taken back today? If you want Katchatheevu back, you will have to go to war to get it back'.

Kharge also questioned the government's foreign policy with regard to India's neighbours including Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives.

—PTI

BJP says Oppn rally is to 'save family'

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

BJP on Sunday slammed the Opposition INDIA bloc's rally at Ramlila ground here, saying it is not a "save democracy" meeting as projected but a "save family" and "hide corruption" rally.

BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi cited corruption cases of a host of leaders, including those from Congress, DMK and RJD, to assert that all these charges date back to pre-2014 period amid the Opposition's accusation that Modi government is implicating them in graft probes due to its political vendetta.

Ramlila ground once hosted "India against corruption" movement under the leadership of Anna Hazare, Trivedi said, adding that it is hosting on Sunday a rally for "everybody with corruption".

People who trashed many leaders as thieves and crooks have joined hands with them, and it is a strange and startling sight, he said, in an apparent reference to the coming together of Aam Aadmi Party with other Opposition parties.

Their leader is now Lalu Prasad Yadav, a convict in several corruption cases, he added.They are all here to hide their old sins and it must be noted that they had been against the construction of the Ram temple and some of them called for eradication of Hinduism, he alleged.

These parties represent the crisis of credibility in Indian politics while BJP under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi symbolises the politics of credibility and the track record of delivering on its promises.In a swipe at Opposition parties, he said while they claim to have come together to save democracy but they are themselves dynastic organisations which never allowed others to rise.

People will give them a befitting reply in the polls, he said. *—PTI*

POLITICAL JAB

Mamata Banerjee accuses INDIA bloc of joining hands with BJP

KRISHNANAGAR, 31 MARCH

Mamata Banerjee with party candidate Mahua Moitra and others at an election rally in Nadia on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday accused its INDIA bloc partners CPI(M) and Congress of "joining hands with the BJP" in West Bengal and asserted that the opposition alliance has "ceased to exist" in the state.

The Trinamool Congress supremo urged people not to cast their votes in favour of the Left-Congress-ISF alliance in West Bengal as "voting for them would mean voting for the BJP".

"There is no INDIA alliance in West Bengal. I had played a key role in the formation of the opposition bloc. Even its name was given by me. But, the CPI (M) and Congress are working for the BJP in the state," she said.

Banerjee claimed that although TMC leaders are being "hounded by the CBI and ED", not a single CPI(M) or Congress leader in West Bengal has been arrested by these agencies.In January, Banerjee had announced that her party would contest the Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal alone, rebuffing efforts by the Congress leadership to negotiate a seat-sharing agreement. *—PTI*

NO HINDU WILL BE LEFT IN ASSAM CONG BY 2026: CM

GUWAHATI, 31 MARCH

Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in the country, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma launched a scathing attack on Congress party, saying that Hindus won't remain in Assam Congress by 2026.

He said, "By 2026, there will be no more Hindus in Assam Congress and almost all Muslims will leave Congress by 2032. We will open a branch at Rajiv Bhawan as Mahanagar BJP. Many Congress leaders will join BJP tomorrow."

The statement by Assam Chief Minister was made as he visited the state BJP headquarters in Guwahati on Saturday and attended a crucial meeting to take stock of the preparedness for Lok Sabha polls.

"A meeting of the Prabharis of 126 assembly constituencies was held at the state BJP headquarters in Guwahati. Three members of Congress joined BJP on Saturday. Others will join BJP on Sunday. I will go to Majuli and my election campaign will start in Majuli on 1 April with a cycle rally", Sarma said.Talking about the welfare of Muslim society in the state, Sarma said, "I am trying to work to reform their society. Many Muslim youths are supporting me, as you can see on Facebook and they all welcome this. No one opposes it."On the other hand, talking about Jorhat parliamentary constituency, he said that BJP will win the Jorhat seat. "A section is trying to create an atmosphere against me, but the ground reality is different," he added.He stated that the political parties are under the people and they must seek their blessings. *—ANI*

Bhojpuri stars glow outside Bihar

PATNA, 31 MARCH

Bhojpuri stars are making it big in national politics but they seem conspicuous by their absence in the electoral battle in Bihar, the very springhead of the language spoken in places as far-off as Mauritius, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago.

Manoj Tiwari, who hails from the state's Atarwalia village in Kaimur district, has made Delhi his political "karma bhoomi" while in Uttar Pradesh, Ravi Kishan and Dinesh Lal Yadav 'Nirahua' are seeking re-election from seats close to their native places.

In the run-up to Lok Sabha polls, there was a lot of buzz around Pawan Singh, a native of Arrah, entering the fray. He got a ticket, but, surprisingly, from West Bengal, and withdrew from the contest following a controversy. Speculations are rife that internet sensation Neha Singh Rathore would get a Congress ticket ever since she attended a number of party events, including Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra'.

"Several Bhojpuri superstars are in the fray for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, but none has been fielded from Bihar, the epicentre of the regional film industry, or neighbouring Jharkhand", said Gunjan Kumar, the lone popular Bhojpuri/Magahi singer who has thrown his hat in the ring from Bihar.Kumar is contesting as an Independent candidate from Nawada Lok Sabha constituency.

Kumar said he approached all major political parties to make him a candidate from his hometown, Nawada. But, none agreed, forcing him to contest as an Independent. *—PTI*

RS 1L YEARLY TO WOMEN

Congress also promises house worth Rs 5 lakh to homeless family *PHOTO: X*

Congress unveils 9 guarantees in Andhra

AMARAVATI, 31 MARCH

Congress in Andhra Pradesh has announced 'nine guarantees', including Rs 1 lakh yearly to women and Rs 2 lakh farm loan waiver, to be implemented if voted to power in the state in the 13 May Assembly polls.

APCC Chief YS Sharmila said if Congress comes to power at the Centre, it would ensure special category status to Andhra Pradesh for 10 years as its first guarantee.

An additional 50 per cent to farmers on the minimum support price, hike in minimum wage under Employment Guarantee Scheme to Rs 400 per day, free education from KG to PG are some of the guarantees made by the grand old party.

Congress also promised to allot a house worth Rs 5 lakh to each poor homeless family and monthly social security pension of Rs 4,000 to beneficiaries and Rs 6000 to disabled persons. *—PTI*

Case transferred in zero FIR against KTR

HYDERABAD, 31 MARCH

A day following the registration of a zero FIR against Working President of BRS in Telangana, Kalvakuntla Taraka Rama Rao (KTR) at Hanamkonda Police Station, and the case has been swiftly transferred to Banjara Hills Police.

Earlier, Congress leader Bathini Srinivas Rao filed a complaint against former minister in Hanmakonda on Friday, for making allegations against Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy.

Criticising the allegations, Congress leader said that KTR made false and misleading allegations against Reddy that he collected Rs 2,500 crores from contractors and builders and sent the amount to Delhi.

Earlier on Friday, Reddy responded to KTR's remark that 'phones may have been tapped' and Reddy warned that anyone who was involved in the alleged phone-tapping under the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government, 'will be sent to jail.'

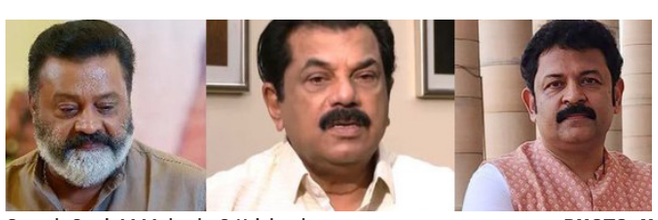
"Earlier, the government scared the people who voted for them by putting cases on them and phone tapping.'KTR is saying that they tapped a few calls, so what?' Can anyone speak like that? If you tap phones, you will go to Cherlapalli jail. The officers who listened to them are in jail. We already said that they are evil doers, thieves, and if you listen to them, you will go to jail. KTR is speaking like an unbridled bull. They will pay for it, but the case is under investigation," Reddy said.

The incident revolves around allegations of phone tapping of political leaders Reddy, during the previous BRS government. *—ANI*

STAR WARS

In Kerala, 3 actors draw swords in LS polls

KOCHI, 31 MARCH



Suresh Gopi, M Mukesh, G Krishnakumar *PHOTO: X*

As the state gears up for the pivotal moment of democratic expression, three prominent actors have thrown their hats into the political ring in Kerala.

While superstar and senior actor Suresh Gopi is trying his luck from the Thrissur constituency on a BJP ticket, well-known actor and sitting Left MLA M Mukesh is contesting from the Kollam Lok Sabha seat.

The saffron party has fielded its leader and actor G Krishnakumar to take on Mukesh in Kollam and UDF candidate NK Premachandran, a seasoned politician, who represents Kollam seat currently.

Unlike neighbouring Tamil Nadu, where film personalities have been playing a key role in determining its political future for several decades, the convergence of the entertainment industry and politics in Kerala is happening very slowly.

Currently, there are four artists from the Malayalam tinsel town elected to the state Assembly.

Apart from Mukesh, state Transport Minister KB Ganesh Kumar, Mani C Kappan and Daleema Jojo were elected to the state Assembly in the 2021 elections.

"Actors joining politics has become common in Kerala for over a decade," said B Unnikrishnan, the General Secretary of the Film Employees Federation of Kerala (FEFKA) Directors Union. *—PTI*

LS POLLS: SOUTH WILL HELP REACH MODI'S TARGET OF 370, SAYS GADKARI

NAGPUR, 31 MARCH

Avowing abiding confidence in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goal of 370 seats, BJP leader Nitin Gadkari says the additional seats to its current strength of 288 will come from gains in southern India in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

In a wide-ranging interview at his residence in Nagpur, Gadkari said there is "no doubt" in his mind that BJP-led NDA alliance will cross 400 seats and that Modi will take over as Prime Minister for a third term because of the solid work done by the government in the last 10 years.He dismissed allegations that Modi government is "weaponising" central probe agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate and CBI to weaken the Opposition, saying BJP's rivals should make efforts to overcome adversity by winning the confidence of the people.

Gadkari who won with a margin of more than two lakh seats in the 2019 elections said his goal this time is to win by a five lakh margin. He said he is confident of getting minority and Dalit votes this time.BJP won 303 seats on its own in the 2019 elections but its tally in the outgoing Lok Sabha is now 288. This follows some bypoll losses and resignations of some MPs after they recently moved to state assemblies. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Villagers-police clash in Telangana: 21 detained

HYDERABAD, 31 MARCH

As many as 21 villagers were detained after they clashed with police following a row between groups of two neighbouring villages in Telangana's Khammam district on Sunday, a senior official said.The incident occurred in Sathupalli mandal of the district. Police said that a fight broke out between two groups of residents of Buggapadu and Chandrayapalem villages over a group's alleged encroachment of forest land. Police and forest officials soon reached the spot and negotiated with the villagers, after which one group left. But the other allegedly attacked the police resulting in injuries to some personnel, a senior official told PTI. The official alleged that police personnel were pushed aside and some were allegedly hit with sticks by villagers. *—PTI*

2 dead, 8 injured as car plunges into gorge in U'khand

TEHRI GARHWAL, 31 MARCH

Two people died and eight were injured after a car lost control and fell into a gorge in Duwakoti village in the Gaja sub-district of Tehri Garhwal district in Uttarakhand on Sunday. A total of ten people were there in the vehicle. Upon receiving the information, SDRF and local police team reached the spot. The local people, along with the police team gathered to retrieve the bodies from the gorge. Eight people injured in the accident were taken to the Gaja hospital, District Disaster Officer Brijesh Bhatt informed. *—PTI*

Guj: 4 of family die of asphyxiation after fire at house

DEVBHUMI DWARKA, 31 MARCH

Four members of a family, including an infant, died of asphyxiation after a fire broke out at their house in Gujarat's Devbhumi Dwarka district on Sunday, police said. The blaze erupted on the first floor of the house located on Aditya Road in Dwarka city at around 3.30am when five members of the family were sleeping, police inspector TC Patel said.The family members could not escape as they failed to locate the exit door after the power supply to the house went off following the blaze, he said. They were rushed to a government hospital where doctors declared them brought dead, the official said. The fire is suspected to have been caused due to a blast in an air conditioner after overheating, officials said. The deceased have been identified as Pawan Upadhyay,39, his wife Tithi,29, daughter Dhyana and mother Bhavaniben,69. *—PTI*

Guv post 'serious', must act under Constitution: Judge

She says time has come where they will be told how to discharge duties

HYDERABAD, 31 MARCH

Supreme Court Judge BV Nagarathna has cautioned against instances of governors sitting indefinitely on bills passed by elected legislatures, referring to the case involving the Punjab Governor.

In her keynote address at the inaugural session of the fifth edition of Courts and the Constitution Conference, held at the NALSAR University of Law here on Saturday, Justice Nagarathna spoke about the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly case as another instance of gubernatorial overreach, where the governor lacked sufficient material to declare the floor test.

"This is not a healthy trend under the Constitution to bring the actions or omissions of the Governor of a state for consideration before constitutional courts," she said.

SC Judge BV Nagarathna said that it is not a healthy trend to bring the actions or omissions of Guvs for consideration before courts PHOTO: PTI

"I think I must appeal that the office of a governor, though it is called a gubernatorial post, the governor's post is a serious constitutional post, the governors must discharge their duties under the constitution in accordance with the Constitution so that this kind of litigation before the law courts is reduced," Justice Nagarathna added.She said it was quite embarrassing for the governors to be told to do or not to do a thing.

So, a time has come where they would be now told to discharge their duties as per the Constitution, she said.

Justice Nagarthna's comments came days after a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud expressed "serious concern" over the conduct of Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi for his refusal to reinduct DMK leader K Ponmudi as a minister in the state cabinet.

Justice Nagarathna also spoke on her dissent on the demonetisation case.She said she had to dissent against the move by the central government as in 2016, when the decision was announced, the Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes comprised 86 per cent of the total currency notes in circulation, and 98 per cent of it came back after they were banned. *—ANI*

ROW OVER SKIN COLOUR

Dancer booked for remarks on fellow artiste

T'PURAM, 31 MARCH

Kerala Police on Saturday registered a case against noted Mohiniyattam dancer Kalamandalam Satyabhama over her controversial remarks allegedly against a fellow artiste.

The Cantonment police here registered the case based on a complaint filed by noted Mohiniyattam dancer RLV Ramakrishnan.

As a video clip of Satyabhama's remarks made on a YouTube channel went viral on social media and was aired on news channels last week, Ramakrishnan had alleged that her comments were directed at him and threatened to initiate legal action against her.

The video and her subsequent statements defending what she had said were severely criticised by many on social media, cutting across political lines.

Further proceedings in the case would be decided later, he added.Satyabhama, however, had not specified whom she was referring to.

Kerala Ministers Saji Cheriyan, R Bindu and Veena George, Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly VD Satheesan, BJP state chief K Surendran, among others, had condemned her remarks.

The Kerala Kalamandalam, a premier public institution that preserves the state's artistic heritage, had also condemned Satyabhama's remarks. *—PTI*

HIGHEST CIVILIAN HONOUR

President Murmu confers Bharat Ratna on BJP stalwart LK Advani

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday conferred Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian honour, on Bharatiya Janata Party stalwart and former deputy prime minister LK Advani at his residence here.

The ceremony was attended by Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and the family members of Advani, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a post on X.

President Murmu presented the Bharat Ratna to Advani at his residence, it said.

Advani, a doyen of Indian politics, has served the nation with unwavering dedication and distinction for over seven decades, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said.

Born in Karachi in 1927, he migrated to India in 1947 against the backdrop of partition.

President Droupadi Murmu confers Bharat Ratna on veteran BJP leader LK Advani at his residence, along with PM Modi, on Sunday PHOTO: PTI

With his vision of cultural nationalism, he toiled hard for decades, across the length and breadth of the country, and brought about a transformation in the socio-political landscape, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said."When the Emergency put India's democracy at risk, the indefatigable crusader in him helped guard it against authoritarian tendencies," it said in the post on X and shared pictures of the ceremony. Advani,96, served as the deputy prime minister from June 2002 to May 2004 and as the Union Home Minister from October 1999 to May 2004. He had been BJP president multiple times -- from 1986 to 1990, 1993 to 1998 and 2004 to 2005. *—PTI*

SC to hear plea against pooja in Gyanvapi

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on 1 April a Gyanvapi mosque management committee's plea against an Allahabad High Court decision upholding a lower court's order allowing Hindu prayers in the southern cellar of the mosque.

A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra will hear the plea of Anjuman Intezamia Masajid Committee, which manages the affairs of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, challenging the High Court's 26 February decision.

The High Court had dismissed the committee's plea in which it had challenged the district court's 31 January order allowing Hindus to offer prayers in the cellar.

While dismissing the plea of the mosque committee on February 26, the high court had observed that the Uttar Pradesh government's 1993 decision of stopping worship rituals inside the "Vyas Tehkhana" -- located at the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi -- was "illegal".

It had said that the worship rituals were stopped by "illegal action of the state without there being any order in writing" and rejected two appeals filed by the mosque management committee challenging the Varanasi district judge's 17 January order -- that appointed the district magistrate as the receiver of the "Vyas Tehkhana" -- and the 31 January order by which the judge allowed 'puja' to be performed there.

The High Court ordered that worship will continue in the "Vyas Tehkhana" of the mosque, which stands adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple. A survey conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on the court's order had suggested that the Gyanvapi mosque was constructed during Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's rule over the remains of a Hindu temple *—PTI*

3 STUDENTS FILE FIR AGAINST PROF OVER HARASSMENT

KOLKATA, 31 MARCH

Three female students of Visva Bharati have lodged a First Information Report (FIR) against a guest professor alleging that he has asked for sexual favour in exchange for passing them in semester exams.

In the complaint, the three students of Persian, Urdu and Islamic Studies department alleged that the guest teacher concerned sent lewd messages on WhatsApp to them individually, and inappropriately touched them at times.

A Visva Bharati official told PTI if the three students approach the ICC (internal complaints committee) of the central university, "it will look into the charges and take appropriate action."

The said teacher had even promised to help them in the semester exams if the three girls agreed to his proposals, the students alleged.

A copy of the complaint, lodged at Santiniketan police station on 28 March and recorded in the court of ACJM, Bolpur, was made available to PTI on Saturday.

A police official said investigations are on.

The accused teacher denied the charges and said he was being framed.

Visva Bharati University Faculty Association spokesperson Sudipta Bhattacharya said proper inquiry should be conducted at the earliest into the allegations. *—PTI*

Girl dies after eating cake on b-day, baker booked

PATIALA, 31 MARCH

A 10-year-old girl died of suspected food poisoning after consuming her birthday cake in Punjab's Patiala, her family alleged in their complaint to police on Sunday.

Based on a complaint lodged by the family, police have filed a First Information Report (FIR) in connection to the incident that took place at Aman Nagar in Patiala on 24 March.

According to police, the deceased, identified as Manvi, lived with her grandparents.

SHO Anaj Mandi Gurmeet Singh said that the 10-year-old girl celebrated her birthday on 24 March.

Her family ordered the cake through an online food delivery application.

The family members claimed that they cut the cake around 7.00pm.

They told the police that after cutting the cake, Manvi went to sleep.

They claimed that after going to sleep, Manvi asked for water and went back to sleep.

The family members later went to check on her and found her in an unconscious state. They rushed her to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared her dead.

The girl's family alleged that other members of the family who ate the cake also fell ill.Based on the family's complaint, a case under relevant sections of the IPC has been registered against the concerned bakery shop owner, police said. *—ANI*

Riyas Maulavi murder case: Court acquits three RSS workers

KASARAGOD, 31 MARCH

Kasargod Principal Sessions Court has acquitted three RSS workers, Nitinkumar, Ajesh and Akhilesh, natives of Kalluggude, in connection with the murder of 34-year-old Madrasa teacher Mohammed Riyas.

The principal sessions judge, KK Balakrishnan, passed the verdict on Saturday.

Riyas Moulavi was murdered in Old Choori inside Old Juma Masjid, allegedly by RSS workers, on 20 March, 2017.

Earlier, the police charged IPC sections 449 (house trespass), 302 (murder), 153A (promoting enmity on the ground of religion), 295 (defiling a place of worship), 201 (destruction of evidence), and 34 (common intention) against the accused.

The prosecutor said, "The accused people, who were strong believers of the Hindutva ideology, had strong animosity and hatred towards members of the Muslim community, which resulted in the murder."

Riyas Moulavi was murdered in Old Choori inside Old Juma Masjid, allegedly by RSS workers, on 20 March, 2017 PHOTO: X

Riyaz Moulavi's family responded to the verdict by calling it disappointing.

The accused have been in jail for seven years since their arrest. They were not granted bail. So far, seven judges have considered the case. The police presented more than 50 documents, including DNA test results, to the court. *—ANI*

AAI upgrades Port Blair's VSI airport from grade III to II

Port Blair, 31 March

The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has upgraded the category of Veer Savarkar International (VSI) Airport at Port Blair in Andaman and Nicobar Islands from grade III to grade II airport, an official said.The VSI Airport was a grade III category airport and headed by a joint general manager level officer but after its upgradation to the grade II category, it will be headed by a general manager level executive who will have more powers to execute work as per the delegation of powers by AAI, the official said.The classification of various airport categories is done for the purpose of deciding the level of executive to head the airport and it has been decided based on parameters such as passenger traffic, development activities, profitability and number of employees, etc. *—PTI*

IN MANIPUR

Self-help groups train relief camp women

IMPHAL, 31 MARCH

Several self help groups are imparting skill-based training such as making of incense sticks (agarbatti), candles and disinfectants to women displaced by the violence in Manipur and staying in relief camps to help them become economically independent.

Kongkham Monica, a woman from Serou area staying at Wangkhei Relief Camp in Imphal East district said she received skill training in making incense sticks, candles from a women self help group.

"We have been staying at this camp after our homes were burnt in May... and were dependent entirely on donation of others. We didn't have even ten rupees when we first came here. A women self help group Kangleipak Women Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd conducted a skill training programme and taught us how to make disinfectants, incense sticks, candles and ways of packaging so that we can use these skills to earn a living", the mother of three said.

Several self help groups are imparting skill-based training to women displaced by the violence PHOTO: PIXABAY

She said the raw materials required to make these items are given by local volunteers who help in running the relief camps.

The profits from the sales are kept by the displaced people, Kongkham said.

"The skill training programme has helped us to earn a little money. Earlier when we came to the camp, we had nothing but totally depended on donation of others. But now even though things are still hard we are trying," she said, adding that a market shed was also built by a civil body to sell our items.

Similar skill training is being provided by 'Eta: North East Women's Network', a non-profit group, which conducted multiple training programmes to support displaced victims of Manipur violence.

"After violence broke out, we conducted survey in 26 relief camps in Bishnupur district which is one of the worst affected districts in the state," Samom Beerjurekha, trustee of Eta, told PTI.

"We interacted with hundreds of displaced women to assess their skills and explore available opportunities for them to enhance their economic sustainability," Samom said.Eta has purchased at least 29 looms and distributed it to beneficiaries as part of its mission to improve women's empowerment, she claimed. *—PTI*

Shahjahan shown arrested after ED grilling inside jail

BARASAT, 30 MARCH

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday questioned suspended Trinamool Congress leader Shahjahan Sheikh in the Basirhat Correctional Home in connection with cases involving land grabbing and financial irregularities in Sandeshkhali, an official said.

Sheikh, who is currently in judicial custody, was also "shown arrested" after he allegedly non-cooperated with the central agency officials during questioning.

Even when a person is in judicial custody, he can be shown arrested in respect of any number of other crimes registered elsewhere.

"He has been non-cooperative when our officers questioned him inside the jail this afternoon. So we decided to arrest him," the officer told PTI.

He was first arrested by the state police in February, and then the CBI earlier this month and by the ED on Saturday.

- Shahjahan Sheikh, who is currently in judicial custody, was also "shown arrested" after he allegedly non-cooperated with the central agency officials during questioning

According to the ED sources, Sheikh has played an active role in the multi-crore ration distribution scam and not only siphoned the money abroad but also utilised it in fishing businesses in Sandeshkhali.

"He has accumulated properties worth over Rs 30 crores and we want to know about the source of that huge amount of money.," he added.

A team of ED officers interrogated him inside the jail for over four hours after getting permission from Basirhat sub-divisional court in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. *—PTI*

- A copy of the complaint, lodged at Santiniketan police station on 28 March and recorded in the court of ACJM, Bolpur, was made available to PTI on Saturday. A police official said investigations are on.The accused teacher denied the charges and said he was being framed. Visva Bharati said proper inquiry should be conducted at the earliest into the allegations

RESULTS DECLARED

Students celebrate their success after the declaration of the class 10th results of the Bihar Board, in Patna, on Sunday
PHOTO: PTI

Bihar migrants forced to sacrifice ballot rights

As India gears up for the Lok Sabha Election 2024, a significant segment of the electorate finds itself facing an unexpected barrier: financial constraints preventing migrant workers from making the journey back to their hometowns to cast their votes. Despite their eagerness to participate in the democratic process, the harsh realities of economic hardship is rendering this fundamental right out of reach for many.

With meagre wages, the prospect of undertaking a costly journey home poses an insurmountable challenge for these migrant workers. For many, the choice between earning a livelihood and participating in the electoral process becomes a stark reality, with economic exigencies dictating their decisions.

Sanjay Jha, a migrant worker, is upbeat about the Lok Sabha elections being held in April-May and is keen to exercise his voting rights. However, the 30-something-year-old works as a security guard at an apartment building in Mumbai, Maharashtra and is unlikely to visit his native village in Bihar for it again.

Jha recalled that he failed to vote last time during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls because he could not manage to travel back to his Rupauli village in the Runnisaidpur block in Sitamarhi district in Bihar and expressed helplessness for not participating in the festival of democracy.

Jha earns Rs 15,000 every month and spending Rs 5,000 to 6,000 to go back home just to vote is unthinkable. "This is a huge amount of money for me. If I could afford the travel costs, there would be no issue. I am not alone; most of the aparwasi majdoor (migrant workers) have been facing this reality that forces them not to vote," he pointed out.

Thousands of migrant workers like Jha face this issue every time during elections and do not get a chance to exercise their right to vote.

The return of migrant workers caused an increase in voting percentage ***PHOTO: X/ @SURENDERMOTIXI***

Shabbir Sheikh, a labourer at a marble shop near Goregaon in Mumbai, has a similar story to Jha's.

Sheikh is in his 40s and hails from a village in Thakurganj block in Kishanganj district, Bihar. Even back in his village, his family does not own any land or a concrete house.

He admitted that he wants to vote if there was a facility to visit his village free of charge and was not aware if there are arrangements for people like him to vote locally. "My family of six can't afford to visit our village more than once a year, as it costs at least Rs 5,000 for the travel. For someone who earns Rs 15,000 per month, this is a huge amount of money," Sheikh said.

A young migrant worker, Sefayat Hussain, a resident of a village in Bahadurganj block in Kishanganj district, Bihar, also pointed out that trains were expensive. "I work in Mumbai and after paying for living expenses and sending money to my family, I hardly save anything," he said.

With no work available near his home, Hussain was forced to migrate. "Why else would I leave my family back home and travel such a long distance way for a low-paid livelihood," he said.

Poor migrant workers from underdeveloped areas are forced to move far away in search of jobs, and receive no help from authorities to facilitate their return home for voting, rued Harendar Mandal, a resident of Dumaria village in Murliganj block in Madhepura district in Bihar.

Koshi and Seemanchal regions — comprise nearly a dozen districts including Katihar, Purnea, Araria, Kishanganj, Madhepura, Saharsa, and Supaul — are the hubs of migrant workers due to a high rate of poverty, an official from the state labour department said on condition of anonymity.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, thousands of migrant workers returned home to these regions, facing immense pain, struggle and misery during the arduous journey back home.

Jai Prakash Yadav, a migrant who sells fruits on the pavements in Mumbai, visited his village Mainadih in Kateya block in Gopalganj district, Bihar in March 2024 to attend a marriage. "I can only afford to visit the village next year now," he said, expressing helplessness at his financial constraints.

According to a senior officer of the Bihar State Election Commission, the return of thousands of migrant workers to the state caused an increase in the voting percentage in the Bihar assembly elections in October-November 2020, particularly in districts with a higher percentage of returning migrant voters.

The increase in voters was primarily due to the return of migrant workers, who would not have been present for voting under normal circumstances.

—Downtoearth

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Ice melting in Antarctica is slowing Earth's rotation

Ice melting in Greenland and Antarctica, driven by global warming, is affecting timekeeping the world over by slowing down the Earth's rotating speed, according to a new research. As a result, a second might need to be deducted from the Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) three years later than otherwise, it found.

The study author, Duncan Agnew, explained that because the Earth doesn't always rotate at the same speed, the UTC consists of discontinuities.

Since 1972, all discontinuities have required that a 'leap second' be added, because many networked activities like computing and financial markets require the consistent, standardised and precise timescale provided by the UTC, he said.

Agnew is a geophysicist at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at University of California San Diego, US.

Using mathematical modelling, Agnew showed that the rate at which the Earth's liquid core rotates -- angular velocity -- has been slowing down. To compensate for this, the rotating speed of the solid Earth has steadily increased.

The compensatory effect comes from the fact that for a closed system such as the Earth, angular momentum -- the rate at which rotating speed changes -- is a conserved quantity and doesn't change, he explained.

His study has been published in the journal Nature.

The rotating speed of Earth has declined ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

- Since 1972, all discontinuities have required that a 'leap second' be added, because many networked

He found that the effect of the solid Earth rotating faster has resulted in fewer leap seconds being needed to be added to the UTC in recent decades.

When extrapolated to the future, he predicted that a leap second will need to be deducted from the global primary standard of timekeeping as early as the year 2026.

However, Agnew also found that the increased melting of ice caps in Greenland and Antarctica has slowed down the Earth's rotation more rapidly than ever before and therefore, he estimated that the leap second will not need to be deducted until the year 2029.

The ice melting was measured by satellite gravity.

The findings suggested a possible problem for computer network timing, and thus, changes in the policy of aligning UTC to the Earth's rotation may need to be made earlier than currently planned, Agnew said.

He noted that if the melting of polar ice caps had not recently accelerated, the turning back of the UTC by a leap second would be required three years earlier - in 2026.

He also said that global warming and global timekeeping have become "inextricably linked" and may become more so in the future. *—PTI*

The ice melting was measured by satellite gravity. Global warming and global time keeping have become inextricably linked and may become more so in the future. Increased melting of ice caps in Greenland and Antartica has slowed down the Earth's rotation rapidly ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

Putin wants Berlin assassin Krasikov, but swap is murky

In the summer of 2013, a Moscow restaurant owner was gunned down in the Russian capital. A hooded man jumped off a bike and shot his victim twice before fleeing.

Six years later, an exiled Chechen commander, Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, was murdered in a busy Berlin park in eerily similar circumstances, shot by a man on a bike with a silenced Glock 26 in broad daylight.

The assailant was arrested after dumping a pistol and wig in the River Spree close to the Reichstag, the building housing the German parliament.

A passport bearing the name "Vadim Sokolov" was found on the Berlin assassin, but authorities quickly concluded that was not his name after all.

The bald, strongly built man they had arrested was actually Vadim Krasikov, a Russian national with links to the FSB, the Russian security service - and the prime suspect in the 2013 murder in Moscow.

In a recent interview with US TV talk show host Tucker Carlson, Russia's President Vladimir Putin appeared to confirm reports that his country was seeking the release of the "patriot" Krasikov in exchange for American journalist Evan Gershkovich.

This month marked one year since Gershkovich, a reporter for the Wall Street Journal, was detained in Russia on espionage charges that are denied by him, his newspaper and the US government.

- Two years later, the arrest warrant was withdrawn and the "Vadim Krasikov" identity seemingly vanished into thin air

Gershkovich isn't the only American in a Russian jail whose fate could be entwined with Krasikov's. Former US Marine Paul Whelan and US-Russian citizen Alsu Kurmasheva are also detained in Russia on charges widely viewed as politically motivated.

Even the late Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny, who was serving a 19-year prison sentence in Russia, was said to be part of a swap involving Krasikov before he died, according to his allies. Following the Russian election, President Putin said he had agreed to release Navalny in return "for some people" held in the West, but the White House said that was the first it had heard of any such deal.

Vadim Krasikov is the prime suspect in the 2013 Moscow murder ***PHOTO: X/ @PLANETREPORTHQ***

If President Putin's price stays the same, it means the most viable way of securing the release of the detained Americans would be a complex prisoner swap for Krasikov needing the cooperation of Germany, the US and Russia.

State-sanctioned killing

The first clues of a possible Kremlin hand in the Berlin murder come from Krasikov's background - or rather, the lack of one.

Documents obtained by the Bellingcat investigative website show he was wanted over the 2013 Moscow murder. However, two years later, the arrest warrant was withdrawn and the "Vadim Krasikov" identity seemingly vanished into thin air.

A German court concluded that this documentation could only be sanctioned by the Kremlin, and therefore that Vadim Krasikov had state support for the Berlin murder.

His victim, Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, was a Chechen rebel commander between 2000 and 2004, when Chechnya was fighting a war of independence against Russia.

To Western observers, Khangoshvili seemed likely to be part of a string of Moscow-ordered assassinations of Chechen exiles in Europe and the Middle East.

The Kremlin denied orchestrating the Berlin murder, and dismissed the verdict against Krasikov as "politically motivated".

However, in his Tucker Carlson interview, President Putin appeared to make an admission when he said negotiations were under way for an exchange involving a Russian "patriot" who had "eliminated a bandit" in a European capital.

FSB's contract with assassins

Vadim Krasikov belonged to the highly secretive 'Vympel' unit of Russia's secret service, the FSB, according to prosecutors at his trial.

Krasikov personally met Putin at a target shooting range while serving with Vympel, owned a BMW and Porsche, and travelled for work regularly, according to an interview his brother-in-law gave The Insider.

An association between Krasikov and the FSB would provide one explanation for why Vladimir Putin, a former foreign intelligence officer himself, would be willing to hand over a prisoner of the value of Evan Gershkovich.

But Mark Galeotti said a potential deal says more about Russia's social contract with agents abroad than the value of Krasikov individually.

Jürgen Hardt, from the Christian Democrats, said he "didn't see any political support" for rumoured prisoner swaps involving Krasikov.

Nicola Bier, a German lawyer focusing on extradition law, told that there is "no legal mechanism that is really designed for this particular situation", so any move would be highly controversial and political.

Anti-Kremlin political activist Bill Browder is now compiling a list of more than 50 Russian prisoners in Western countries who could be used as bargaining chips to free activists and journalists detained in Russia.

Browder hopes the effort could help release British-Russian journalist Vladimir Kara-Murza, sentenced to 25 years in jail for treason for speaking out against the war in Ukraine. *—BBC News*

PHOTO: Anadolu

Car bomb tears through crowded Syrian market

AZAZ, 31 MARCH

At least seven people have been killed in a car bombing which targeted a busy market in northern Syria. Several more were injured in the attack in the town of Azaz in Aleppo province, near the Turkish border. It is unclear who carried out the attack in the town which is run by pro-Turkish militias fighting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Turkish forces and their proxies control large areas of Syria along the border the two countries share. When the bomb went off the market was busy with shoppers buying new clothes for their children ahead of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan next month. The White Helmets, a volunteer rescue group which operates in Syria, said two children were among the dead. Footage of the aftermath showed bodies lying on the ground, damaged buildings and the remnants of a car on fire. *—BBC News*

Pak PM bans red carpets at official events

ISLAMABAD, 31 MARCH

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has banned the use of red carpets at government events, reserving them exclusively for diplomatic receptions, as part of austerity measures to cut down unnecessary expenditures in the cash-strapped nation. Sharif expressed annoyance over the use of red carpets during the visits of federal ministers and senior authorities at government functions. According to the Cabinet Division, a ban has been imposed on the use of red carpet on the prime minister's directives. According to a notification issued by the Cabinet division, the prime minister has instructed that the red carpet will not be used for federal ministers and government figures at official events in the future. *—PTI*

Small plane crash kills 2 people in California

TRUCKEE, 31 MARCH

Two people died when a small airplane crashed in a California town near the Nevada state line on Saturday evening, police said. A single-engine plane crashed while attempting to land at Truckee Tahoe Airport shortly after 6:30 pm Saturday, the Truckee Police Department said in a social media post. Two deaths were confirmed but it was not immediately known how many people were onboard the plane, police said. The National Transportation Safety Board and Federal Aviation Administration will begin investigating the accident on Sunday, police said. Truckee is located 32 miles (51.5 kilometres) southwest of Reno, Nevada. *—AP*

Haiti police say 2 men were hacked to death by mob

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 31 MARCH

Two men in Haiti were hacked to death by a mob who thought they were buying ammunition or guns for gangs that have terrorized the country, police said Saturday. Police confirmed the crowd snatched the men from police custody after they were found with about $20,000 and the equivalent of about $43,000 in Haitian cash in their car, along with two pistols and a box of ammunition. Carrying that amount of cash was considered suspicious, and residents assumed it was a weapons purchase for the gangs. The killings happened Friday in a town near the provincial city of Mirebalais. Police appeared to fire warning shots into the air to try to prevent the killings, but the mob killed them anyway. *—PTI*

Data from 73 million AT&T accounts leaked online

The company said it had reset customers' passcodes

TEXAS, 31 MARCH

Personal data belonging to 73 million current or former AT&T customers has been leaked online.

Information including addresses, social security numbers and passcodes was published on the dark web, the US telecoms giant said. AT&T said it had not identified evidence indicating the data had been stolen but had brought in cybersecurity experts to investigate.

The company said it had reset customers' passcodes. They were urged by the company to "remain vigilant by monitoring account activity and credit reports".

The data involved in the breach appears to be from 2019 or earlier and is linked to 7.6 million customers and 65.4 million former account holders. It also includes information such as full names, email addresses and dates of birth, though AT&T said financial information had not appeared in the leak.

The data involved in the breach appears to be from 2019 or earlier and is linked to 7.6 million customers *PHOTO: X/@ADENHERZ*

The company said in a statement that it was unclear whether the data had originated from its own systems or via a third-party supplier.

AT&T's wireless 5G network covers around 290 million people across the US and the company is one of the country's largest mobile and internet services providers.

In February, a major outage impacted tens of thousands of phone users, which prompted an apology from the firm and an offer of $5 credit for those affected. Prosecutors in New York launched an investigation into that episode, which left people unable to use their phones for around 12 hours. *—BBC News*

- The data involved in the breach appears to be from 2019 or earlier and is linked to 7.6 million customers and 65.4 former account holders

Peace is not made with arms: Pope in Easter plea

VATICAN, 31 MARCH

Pope Francis has made a strong appeal for an end to wars in Gaza and Ukraine.

"Peace is not made with arms," the Pope said in his traditional Easter message at the Vatican. He called for a ceasefire in the fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza - as well as for the release of all hostages held by Hamas.

The Pope was leading ceremonies at the Vatican. Festivities have been taking place across the world to mark the most important festival in the Christian calendar - Easter.

Jesus was resurrected on Easter Sunday, the Bible says, days after dying on the cross on Good Friday. It is traditional for many to attend services on Saturday evening as well as on Sunday. A day after pulling out of a ceremony at short notice, Pope Francis took part in a two-hour vigil at the Vatican on Saturday. There had been renewed concern about his health when he did not participate in a Good Friday procession. But, the 87-year-old pontiff read a lengthy homily and carried out a number of baptisms. Around the world, people celebrated Easter including in the Philippines where worshippers crowded to get a glimpse of the traditional procession. *—BBC*

- Tens of thousands of worshippers have gathered in St Peter's square to hear Pope Francis lead Easter Sunday Mass

HAPPY EASTER

King Charles III attended the Easter Sunday service at St George's Chapel in Windsor, marking the British monarch's first major public appearance since his cancer diagnosis was made public last month. The 75-year-old royal was joined by wife Queen Camilla, 76. Prince William and his wife Kate Middleton did not join the tradition this year *PHOTO: PTI*

1,70,000 HOMES LEFT WITH POWER

Russia attacks on Ukraine's energy infra; two dead

A rocket is fired from the Russian army's missile system toward Ukrainian position at an undisclosed location on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

KYIV, 31 MARCH

A Russian cruise missile strike on infrastructure in Ukraine's western Lviv region killed at least two, officials said Sunday.

The attack destroyed a building and sparked a fire, Gov Maksym Kozytskyi wrote on social media app Telegram. He said that rescue operations were ongoing. Meanwhile, thousands in Ukraine's Odesa region were temporarily left without power Sunday after debris from a downed Russian drone caused a blaze at an energy facility, Gov Oleh Kiper said. Some 1,70,000 homes were left with temporary power outages as a result of the attack, said Ukraine's largest private electricity operator, DTEK.

The Ukrainian air force said that it shot down nine of the 11 Shahed-type drones launched by Russia overnight, as well as nine out of 14 cruise missiles. Russia has escalated its attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure in recent days, causing significant damage in several regions.

Ukrainian energy company Centrenergo announced Saturday that the Zmiiv Thermal Power Plant, one of the largest thermal power plants in the eastern Kharkiv region, was completely destroyed following Russian shelling last week. Power outage schedules were still in place for around 120,000 people in the region, where 7,00,000 had lost electricity after the plant was hit on 22 March.

Ten Czech-made Vampire rockets also landed in the Russian border region of Belgorod on Sunday, Russia's Ministry of Defense said. One woman was injured when a fire broke out following the attack, said regional Gov Vyacheslav Gladkov.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed orders heralding the start of the country's annual spring recruitment season, officially drafting 1,50,000 conscripts. Russia's parliament raised the upper age limit for conscripts from 27 to 30 in July 2023, in a move that appeared to be part of efforts to expand the country's military during the fighting in Ukraine. All Russian men are obliged to complete the year-long national service, although many avoid the draft by using deferments granted to students, people with chronic illnesses and others. *—AP*

16 arrested for seeking release of hostages, Netanyahu's resignation

TEL AVIV, 31 MARCH

The Israeli police arrested 16 people in Tel Aviv who were holding large protests demanding the release of hostages from Hamas captivity in Gaza and the removal of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, CNN reported.

The police said in a statement on Friday that the protestors were arrested for "for disruption of traffic and road blockages." The police have also imposed an additional nine fines totalling 1,000 shekels (USD 270) for creating disturbances and blocking traffic. "There were large amounts of protestors who disrupted public order by igniting fires, toppling police barriers, obstructing roads, and scuffling with law enforcement: 16 disorderly individuals were arrested and 9 citations of 1000 shekels (USD 270) were written for disruption of traffic and road blockages," the statement read.

CNN reported citing a video from the spot showing police using a water cannon to disperse protesters on the Ayalon Highway in Tel Aviv and arresting at least one person, who was taken into a police vehicle. The footage shows a number of protesters standing in front of the water cannon, chanting: "We will not give up until things get better."

Israel Police encouraged protesters in Tel Aviv to obey the law and avoid violent protests in a separate statement released on Saturday and posted on X. Police add that all roads have been opened as the demonstrations have concluded, Times of Israel reported.

The conflict in Gaza escalated after Hamas carried out a massive terror attack against Israel on 7 October, killing over 1,200 people, taking around 250 people hostage, and even committing sexual assault against civilians. In response, Israel launched a strong counteroffensive targeting the Hamas terror units in the Gaza Strip. However, the operation also led to high civilian casualties. *—ANI*

The police have also imposed an additional nine fines totalling 1,000 shekels *PHOTO: ANADOLU AGENCY*

- The police have also imposed an additional nine fines totalling 1,000 shekels (USD 270) for creating disturbances and blocking traffic

Vienna: Afghans protest against Pak's aggression

VIENNA, 31 MARCH

In a fervent display of solidarity and condemnation, members of the Afghan Cultural Association (AKIS) and the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) wing in Austria protested against Islamabad's recent aerial aggression in Afghanistan and the alarming surge in "extrajudicial killings" in Pakistan. The demonstration held at Stephens Platz, Vienna, on Saturday, was attended by a large Afghan community members residing in Austria. The protest echoed with resounding calls denouncing Pakistan's "illegal" aerial aggression and the cases of extrajudicial killings targeting Baloch and Pashtun minorities in Pakistan.

Banners and placards adorned with scathing critiques of Pakistan and its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency filled the bustling square as protestors voiced their outrage.

The focal point of their ire was Pakistan's "violation of Afghanistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity" through the recent aerial attacks, resulting in the tragic loss of innocent lives, including women and children.

Amid chants condemning the atrocities, demonstrators highlighted the harrowing reality of "extrajudicial killings perpetrated by the Pakistani Army and authorities," specifically targeting Baloch and Pashtun communities.

Ghossudin Mir, the head of AKIS, minced no words in attributing responsibility to Pakistan's military apparatus for fueling ethnic cleansing in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. *—ANI*

- The demonstration held at Stephens Platz, Vienna, on Saturday, was attended by a large Afghan community members residing in Austria

Japan, China discuss disposal of treated water

TOKYO, 31 MARCH

Japan said Sunday its experts have held talks with their Chinese counterparts to try to assuage Beijing's concerns over the discharge of treated radioactive wastewater from the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea.

The discharges have been opposed by fishing groups and neighbouring countries especially China, which banned all imports of Japanese seafood. China's move has largely affected Japanese scallop growers and exporters to China. During the talks held Saturday in the northeastern Chinese city of Dalian, Japanese officials provided "science-based" explanation of how the discharges have been safely carried out as planned, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

A 2011 earthquake and tsunami damaged the Fukushima plant's power supply and reactor cooling functions, triggering meltdowns of three reactors and causing large amounts of radioactive wastewater to accumulate. After more than a decade the plant began discharging the water. *—PTI*

8 killed as houses collapse due to rains in Pakistan

At least 12 people injured *PHOTO: X/@AJENGLISH*

PESHAWAR, 31 MARCH

Heavy rains killed eight people, mostly children, and injured 12 in Pakistan's northwest, an official said Saturday. Downpours in different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province caused rooms to collapse, crushing the people inside, according to Anwar Shahzad, a spokesperson for the local disaster management authority. Shahzad said that three of the dead were siblings aged between 3 and 7 years old, from the same family. The casualties occurred in the past 24 hours, he added. Pakistan has this year experienced a delay in winter rains, which started in February instead of November. Monsoon and winter rains cause damage in Pakistan every year. Across the border in Afghanistan, heavy rainfall on 29 and 30 March destroyed more than 1,500 acres of agricultural land, causing severe damage to hundreds of homes and critical infrastructure like bridges and roads in seven provinces. *—PTI*

CLIMATE CHANGE

Africa: Drought leaves 20M facing hunger

RIO, 31 MARCH

Delicately and with intense concentration, Zanyiwe Ncube poured her small share of precious golden cooking oil into a plastic bottle at a food aid distribution site deep in rural Zimbabwe.

I don't want to lose a single drop, she said. Her relief at the handout paid for by the United States government as her southern African country deals with a severe drought was tempered when aid workers gently broke the news that this would be their last visit.

Ncube and her 7-month-old son she carried on her back were among 2,000 people who received rations of cooking oil, sorghum, peas and other supplies in the Mangwe district in southwestern Zimbabwe. The food distribution is part of a program funded by American aid agency USAID and rolled out by the United Nations' World Food Programme.

They're aiming to help some of the 2.7 million people in rural Zimbabwe threatened with hunger because of the drought that has enveloped large parts of southern Africa since late 2023. It has scorched the crops that tens of millions of people grow themselves and rely on to survive, helped by what should be the rainy season. They can rely on their crops and the weather less and less. The drought in Zimbabwe, neighbouring Zambia and Malawi has reached crisis levels. Zambia and Malawi have declared national disasters. Zimbabwe could be on the brink of doing the same. The drought has reached Botswana and Angola to the west, and Mozambique and Madagascar to the east. A year ago, much of this region was drenched by deadly tropical storms and floods. It is in the midst of a vicious weather cycle: too much rain, then not enough. It's a story of the climate extremes that scientists say are becoming more frequent and more damaging, especially for the world's most vulnerable people. *—AP*

A food agecny is aiming to help at least 2.7 million people in rural Zimbabwe *PHOTO: AFRICANEWS*

- United Nation is aiming to help some of the 2.7 million people in rural Zimbabwe threatened with hunger because of the drought that has enveloped large parts of southern Africa since late 2023

443 infra projects hit by cost overrun of ₹4.92L cr in Feb

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

As many as 443 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or above, were hit by a cost overrun of more than Rs 4.92 lakh crore in February 2024, an official report stated. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), which monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,902 projects, 443 reported cost overruns and 764 projects were delayed. "Total original cost of implementation of the 1,902 projects was Rs 27,08,030.44 crore, and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 32,00,507.55 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,92,477.11 crore (18.19 per cent of original cost)," the ministry's latest report for February 2024 said. *—PTI*

BoI raises lending rate by 10 basis points

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

State-owned Bank of India (BoI) has announced a hike in lending rate by 10 basis points, a move which will make loans, including retail, expensive. The lending rate increase comes ahead of the monetary policy announcement by the Reserve Bank of India on 5 April. The new rate would be effective from Monday. The bank has increased the mark-up by 10 bps from the existing level of 2.75 per cent to 2.85 per cent, and with the present repo rate of 6.5 per cent, the repo-based lending rate (RBLR) will be 9.35 per cent, it said. Meanwhile, in a separate filing, another public sector lender Indian Bank has hiked the lending rate linked to base rate and Benchmark Prime Lending Rate by 5 basis points. The new rates are effective from 3 April in the case of the Indian Bank. *—PTI*

HDFC Bank proposes to sell its subsidiary

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

HDFC Bank has decided to sell its 100 per cent stake in HDFC Education and Development Services Private Ltd. The transaction will be undertaken through the Swiss challenge method, the bank said in a regulatory filing. "HDFC Bank has, on March 30, 2024, entered into a binding term sheet with an interested party, and the offer contained in such term sheet shall serve as the anchor/base bid to seek counter offers from other parties interested in participating in the aforesaid Swiss challenge process," it added. "HDFC Bank will finalise the purchaser on the basis of the completion of the Swiss challenge process," it said, adding that after which the bank and successful bidder would enter into definitive documentation for the purposes. *—PTI*

Royal Orchid Hotels plans to add up to 35 new properties

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Royal Orchid Hotels is planning to add 30-35 new properties with about 2,000 rooms in the 2024-25 fiscal as part of its expansion plans across India, according to its Chairman and Managing Director Chander K Baljee. The company, which operates hospitality properties under the Royal Orchid and Regenta brands, is also looking to expand its wedding destination portfolio by adding four to five locations every year. "We are expanding very fast. We have already crossed 100 hotels, and I think this coming year (2024-25), have already signed up for another 30-35 (hotels to be added)," Baljee told PTI. These new properties will be across various segments under the management contract, he said. On job creation through the new hotels, he said, "We are actually training a lot of people ourselves. Normally, for every room, there is at least one person. We are going to be having 2,000 rooms added, so, 2,000 people will be added". *—PTI*

Adani back to rapid expansion spree

Hindenburg report could not bring down Adani

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Adani group opened a USD 1.2 billion copper plant, bought a port in Odisha in one week PHOTO: PTI

Adani group opened a USD 1.2 billion copper plant, bought a port in Odisha in one week, bought a stake in the country's second-largest cement company and stitched an alliance with rival Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries, all in a matter of one week in signs that the apples-to-airport conglomerate has shrugged off the Hindenburg effect and is back to rapid expansion spree.

In the last one week, Adani group has through regulatory filings and press statements announced expansions and investments in its mainstay ports business, diversification into metal refining, fund infusion into a two-year-old cement foray and continuing progress in the commissioning of its mega solar project.

It started with the 26 March announcement of Adani Ports acquiring a 95 per cent stake in Gopalpur Port for Rs 3,350 crore, taking the number of seaports under its control to 15 - the highest with any private firm in the country.

This was followed by Adani Enterprises Ltd - the group's flagship firm and business incubator - announcing on March 28 the first phase of the world's largest single-location copper manufacturing plant at Mundra in Gujarat, marking the conglomerate's foray into metals refining.

The USD 1.2 billion plant helped India join China and other nations that are rapidly expanding production of copper, a metal crucial for transition away from fossil fuels. Technologies critical to the energy transition like electric vehicles (EVs), charging infrastructure, solar photovoltaics (PV), wind and batteries, all require copper.

On the same day, group promoter Gautam Adani and his family invested Rs 6,661 crore in Ambuja Cements to raise a stake in the country's second-largest cement company to 66.7 per cent as it looked well-positioned to benefit from the country's infrastructure boom.

A day later, Adani Green Energy Ltd - the renewable energy arm of the group - announced the start of operation of its 775-megawatt solar power projects in Khavda, Gujarat. Khavda is the site where it is building a vast solar farm to generate 30 gigawatts of electricity from solar rays as part of its plans to reach 45 GW capacity by 2030. *—PTI*

GLOBAL FIRST

Personal discomfort involved in attaining T+0 settlement: SEBI

AHMEDABAD, 31 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Attaining the global first of T+0 settlement involved a lot of problem-solving and personal discomforts, SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch has said giving the analogy of "onion peeling" for the achievement.

Speaking at the annual convocation of the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) on Saturday, Buch also said the current generation of Indians is on its way to seeing the "high noon" of the new India.

"My colleagues often tell me that problem-solving with me is like peeling an onion. It makes everybody cry in the process. But by the time you are done, peeling layer after layer after layer of the onion, you suddenly realise there is no problem left," she said while addressing students of IIMA as the chief guest of the 59th annual convocation.

Stock exchanges BSE and NSE on Thursday launched the beta version of T+0, or same-day trade settlement on an optional basis for select stocks, which will offer investors an option to transact in 25 securities in T+0 settlement.

Buch said she doggedly followed the mantra of doing what is right, no matter how hard, and leaving no stone unturned, no matter how hard.

Buch further said the graduates will discover their own mantra for going forward, which will be the "default setting" within which it is effortless for them to operate."And until you find that mantra, it is as though you have a quiver full of arrows, some sharp, some not so sharp. And as you aim for the goals that you choose, you may find that your sharp arrows were perfectly well, wonderful, or that you need to sharpen some of your arrows," the SEBI Chief said. Buch said her generation was very fortunate to participate in the dawn of the new India. *— PTI*

PLI schemes attract over ₹1L cr investment

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes for 14 sectors have attracted over Rs 1.06 lakh crore investments till December 2023 with pharma and solar modules accounting for nearly half of the total, according to government data. The response to the schemes was tepid in sectors like IT hardware, auto, and auto components, textiles, and ACC battery storage till December last year.

The government in 2021 announced PLI schemes for 14 sectors such as telecommunication, white goods, textiles, manufacturing of medical devices, automobiles, speciality steel, food products, high-efficiency solar PV modules, advanced chemistry cell battery, drones, and pharma with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore.

According to the data, pharmaceuticals and drugs sector attracted Rs 25,813 crore till December last year, exceeding the expected investments of Rs 17,275 crore.

The major beneficiary in this sector include Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Cipla, Glenmark Pharma, and Wockhardt Ltd.

As regards the high efficiency solar PV modules, the total investment was Rs 22,904 crore as against the expected investment of Rs 1.10 lakh crore. *—PTI*

CBIC notifies rules for GST investigation

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

GST field officers will now have to seek the approval of their zonal principal chief commissioners to initiate an investigation against any big industrial houses or major MNCs and levy duty on goods/services for the first time.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has issued guidelines for Central GST (CGST) officers.

According to the guidelines, when a taxpayer is simultaneously being investigated by the state GST and DGGI officers on different subject matters, the Principal Commissioner will "consider the feasibility" of only one of the offices pursuing all the cases with respect to the taxpayer.

The guidelines have also set a deadline for tax officers to conclude an investigation within one year of their initiation.

It also said that in a situation where it comes to the Commissionerate's notice that either the DGGI or the state GST department is also simultaneously undertaking record-based investigation of the same taxpayer on different subject matters, the Principal Commissioner must engage in dialogue with the other investigating offices to consider the feasibility of only one of the offices pursuing all these subject matters with respect to the taxpayer, and the other offices consolidating their material with that office.*—PTI*

RBI TO SET UP DIGITAL INDIA TRUST AGENCY

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

As part of its efforts to curb growing cyber fraud, the Reserve Bank is considering establishing a Digital India Trust Agency (DIGITA) to stop the mushrooming of illegal lending apps.

The proposed agency will enable verification of digital lending apps and maintain a public register of verified apps, sources said.

Apps not carrying the 'verified' signature of DIGITA should be considered unauthorised for the purpose of law enforcement, sources said, adding that this will serve as a pivotal checkpoint in the fight against financial crimes in the digital realm.A verification process would help instil transparency and accountability within the growing digital lending sector, which has witnessed a surge in fraudulent activities and unscrupulous practices. *—PTI*

ON GLOBAL TRENDS

RBI's macro data to dictate mkt trends

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Sensex climbed 14,659.83 points in the 2023-24 PHOTO: PTI

The Reserve Bank of India's interest rate decision, macroeconomic data and global trends will drive investors' sentiment this week, with markets hoping to continue the positive momentum after ending FY24 on a buoyant note, analysts said.

In addition, the trading activity of foreign investors, the rupee-dollar trend and the movement of global oil benchmark Brent crude would also influence trading in equity markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 14,659.83 points or 24.85 per cent in the 2023-24. The benchmark hit its all-time high of 74,245.17 on 7 March.

"The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is set to start its three-day meeting deliberating interest rates and analysing the state of the economy on April 3 and will end on April 5. Auto stocks will be in focus as companies will announce the monthly sales numbers for March starting from 1 April, 2024.

"Additionally, people will be watching how the rupee fares against the dollar and keeping a tab on crude oil prices. They will also be keeping an eye on investments made by Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) and Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs)," Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst at Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

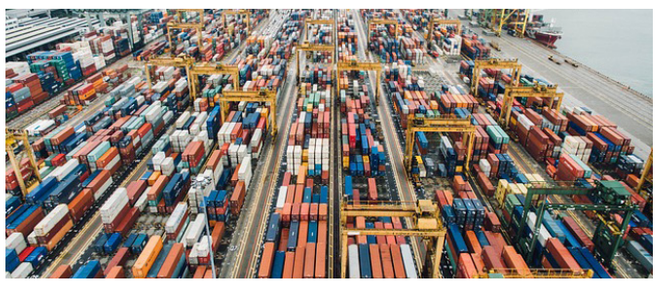
He added that the US Fed Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell's speech is scheduled for 3 April, 2024, and data like the US ISM manufacturing PMI for March will be declared on 1 April.

"US non-farm payrolls data and the unemployment rate for March will be announced on 5 April. These factors will be closely monitored, as they have the potential to influence markets' sentiment," Gour added. *—PTI*

LETTER TO PM

Exporters seek exemption from 45-day payment rule for MSEs goods

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH



Companies must pay within 45 days if there is an agreement, and within 15 days in the absence of such a pact PHOTO: PIXABAY

Indian exporters have urged the government to exempt them from the 45-day payment rule for goods bought from micro and small enterprises (MSEs) as it will impact their businesses. In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, chiefs of major export promotion councils and federation of Indian export organisations have appealed to waive the export companies from section 43B(h) of the Income Tax law.

The new rule, Section 43B(h) of the Income Tax Act, introduced in the Finance Act 2023, is designed to make sure small businesses get paid on time. It allows companies to get tax breaks if they pay their small business suppliers within the time limits set by the MSMED (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development) Act, 2006.

Especially, companies must pay within 45 days if there is an agreement, and within 15 days in the absence of such a pact. If they do not meet these deadlines, they can not deduct these expenses for tax purposes. *—PTI*

Govt forms task force to explore use of biochar

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

The government has set up a task force to explore the use of biochar in steel production as part of its efforts to reduce carbon emissions in the steel industry. According to official data, the domestic steel sector accounts for 12 per cent of India's greenhouse gas emissions with an emission intensity of 2.55 tonnes CO2 per tonne of crude steel compared to the global average of 1.9 tonnes CO2.

The 13 task forces were formed with a focus on various aspects of green steel production. The 14th task force has been constituted to aid the carbon reduction practises in the domestic steel industry by the usage of biochar. *—PTI*

Fundraising via QIP hits ₹78,000 crore in FY24

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Fuelled by improved market sentiments and robust underlying demand, fundraising by issuing shares/units to institutional investors soared to Rs 78,000 crore in 2023-24, a more than seven-fold surge year-on-year.

The 2024-25 fiscal is expected to be very robust as companies will continue to garner capital for capex post-election results.

"In an unprecedented era of economic development aided by pro-business reforms and macroeconomic stability, India is set to become the third largest economy globally by 2027 and will continue to see strong flows.

"In this backdrop, we expect FY25 to also very strong year from a primary capital perspective as companies will continue to look to raise capital for capex post-election results," Neha Agarwal, MD & Head of Equity Capital Markets at JM Financial Ltd, said.

Financial companies raise funds through qualified institutional placement (QIP) to meet their additional capital requirement buffer to support their growth plans and enhance their business. According to data compiled by Prime Database, fundraising through the QIP route reached Rs 78,089 crore in 2023-24, which was way higher than Rs 10,235 crore mopped up in the preceding financial year. This included fund mobilisation by REITs and infrastructure investment trusts (InVITs) through the QIP mode. *—PTI*

RELIANCE INDUSTRIES INVESTS OVER USD 125B IN CAPEX IN LAST 10 YEARS

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Reliance Industries Ltd invested over USD 125 billion in the last ten years as it undertook massive expansion in hydrocarbon and telecom businesses, a report said, estimating that the conglomerate's investments in the next three years would be in relatively less capex-heavy retail and upstream new energy.

"The company has invested nearly USD 30 billion between FY13-18 to increase scale, integration and cost competitiveness of the O2C business, and close to USD 60 billion between FY13-24E in 4G/5G capabilities to create a high-growth telecom business," Goldman Sachs said in a deep dive report on Reliance.

With the pan-India 5G rollout now likely completed and potential telecom tariff hikes ahead, it expected the telecom business to become a strong free-cash-flow generation business alongside current cash cow O2C.

"RIL has invested over USD 125 bn in capex in the last 10 years, mostly in hydrocarbon and telecom, which are more capex intensive and have a longer gestation period," it said.

"While the capex cycle for hydrocarbons and telecom 4G completed during FY17-19, we saw an accelerated telecom capex cycle in 5G, which is now completing in FY24."

The report however expected capex intensity to peak at USD 17.6 billion in FY23 , easing sequentially to USD 11.2 billion by FY26E. *—PTI*

OVERSUPPLY IN CHINA

EV uptake at turning point: Goldman Sachs

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

A Goldman Sachs research report on electric vehicles says the EV uptake is at a turning point, and hybrids and plug-in hybrids are giving a tough competition.

Europe, which has driven EV growth up to now, has shown signs of stagnation since the beginning of 2024. Goldman Sachs report says this is due to concerns about three factors: EVs capital cost due to lower prices of used EVs, poor visibility on government policy visibility, and a shortage of rapid charging stations. These shortages are changing consumer preferences towards Hybrid EVs and plug-in hybrid EVs.

But despite the current slowdown in EVs, the bear-case scenario still calls for EV sales volume to rise 21 per cent YoY in 2024. The report says the bear-case scenario seems more realistic because of the three reasons for the slowdown mentioned above.

EVs sales volume is likely to decline by 2 per cent in 2024 and negative growth would likely result in oversupply across the EV supply chain.

While it is difficult to forecast when used EV prices will bottom out, innovation in batteries is a bottleneck. Batteries currently account for 30-40 per cent of the cost of EVs. Consumers think tomorrows batteries will be superior to today's batteries in terms of

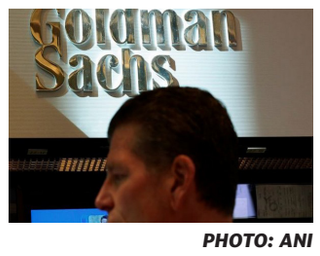


PHOTO: ANI

performance, so used EVs prices is unlikely to stabilize soon. Decline in recent battery prices is not only by technologies but also by over-supply in China's EVs supply chain.

But EVs sales declining trend is not seen in India. Governments Vahan portal dashboard shows an uptrend in EV registrations, especially of 2-wheelers, although 3 and 4 wheelers have shown a marginal decline. In January 2024, EVs registration in India was 1,44,877, in February, it declined a little bit at 1,41,382 but as on 30th March the figure for the month showed an uptrend of 32% at 1,86,143 vehicles.

Automaker Toyota has officially said that HEV margins are higher than margins for Gasoline engine cars. The report suggests that the additional cost of an HEV is compensated over savings on fuel and higher used car prices. For Industry the economic benefit for HEVs are higher margin, comparatively lower capital cost and high confidence in used car prices. *—ANI*

Mumbai look for happy homecoming against RR

A big score is due from Rohit who has provided a strong start to Mumbai

MUMBAI, 31 MARCH

IPL's perennial slow-starters Mumbai Indians under new captain Hardik Pandya will hope for a happy homecoming when they take on a confident Rajasthan Royals at the Wankhede Stadium here on Monday.

Despite the change at the helm with Pandya replacing five-time title-winning skipper Rohit Sharma a move that has sparked a brutal attack on the former Mumbai Indians have once again made a familiar disappointing start to their IPL campaign as they lost their first two matches.

A six-run defeat to Pandya's former team Gujarat Titans was followed by a walloping by Sunrisers Hyderabad who won the record run-fest by 32 runs in Hyderabad, with Mumbai Indians plummeting to the last spot in the 10-team points table.

Sanju Samson and Rohit Sharma PHOTO: PTI

These are still early days in the 17th edition of the T20 league but Pandya's Mumbai Indians will need to end their losing streak and improve their Net Run Rate which is the worst among all teams at -0.925.

Even though Mumbai Indians enjoy a 4-1 head-to-head record in their last five meetings with Rajasthan Royals, the home side will have a tough task at hand given Sanju Samson's team has turned up all guns blazing to begin their IPL season with two wins.

A big score is due from Rohit who has provided a strong start to Mumbai but what they truly need is Pandya to get his decisions right. Pandya has not used Jasprit Bumrah in the best way possible and Mumbai Indians will have a chance to iron out such flaws.

Bumrah and Piyush Chawla bring the element of experience to the table in the MI bowling attack which has shown trust in local boy Shams Mulani, who is relatively new at the IPL stage but immensely experienced when it comes to playing at the Wankhede Stadium.

The young Kwena Maphaka was at the receiving end of the carnage that SRH handed to Mumbai Indians in their last game but the 17-year-old South African will only learn from experience of the hard ways that come to the bowlers' way in such a competitive T20 league. —PTI

Rahul Dravid PHOTO: PTI

DRAVID LAUDS CLASS OF KARNATAKA '74 RANJI TROPHY

BENGALURU, 31 MARCH

Warm spells of nostalgia washed across the room as members of the Karnataka team that won the 1974 Ranji Trophy bundled the audience into a time capsule and took them back to an era where cricket and life were simpler.

None among them shone brighter than Rahul Dravid, former India captain and the team's current head coach."It was an inspiration for all of us. Unassuming those days and players might have been, but the path found by champions like GR Viswanath, Syed Kirmani, Brijesh Patel, EAS Prasanna, and BS Chandrasekhar has only broadened over the years through which several ace cricketers walked through. —PTI

TODAY'S MATCH

MUMBAI INDIANS vs RAJASTHAN ROYALS

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch: **Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network**

Stadium: Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai

David Miller guided the Gujarat Titans to a seven-wicket win PHOTO: PTI

Miller guides GT to a 7-wicket win over SRH

AHMEDABAD, 31 MARCH

Gujarat Titans defeated Sunrisers Hyderabad by seven wickets in their Indian Premier League match here on Sunday.

Set a target of 163, GT completed the chase with five balls remaining. Sai Sudharsan topscored with 45, while David Miller and Shubman Gill chipped in with knocks of 44 and 36 respectively.

After Sunrisers Hyderabad captain Pat Cummins won the toss and elected to bat, most of their batters got starts but failed to convert them into big scores, as the team was stopped at 162/8.

Heinrich Klaasen blasted 24 off 13 balls before missing a straighter one from leg-spinner Rashid Khan to be bowled at a crucial juncture.

Abhishek Sharma got 29 in 20 balls.

Abdul Samad (29 off 14 balls) struck a few useful boundaries to prop up SRH, having gone after the GT bowlers from the outset.

Mohit Sharma (3/25) picked up two wickets in two balls in the last over from which only three runs came.

Brief scores:

Sunrisers Hyderabad: 162/8 in 20 overs (Abhishek Sharma 29, Abdul Samad 29; Mohit Sharma 3/25).

Gujarat Titans: 168/3 in 19.1 overs (Sai Sudharsan 45, David Miller 44 not out). —PTI

PHOTO: AFP

Babar reappointed as Pakistan's white-ball skipper

LAHORE, 31 MARCH

Star batter Babar Azam was on Sunday reappointed as Pakistan's white-ball captain, two months ahead of the T20 World Cup. Babar replaces fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi as the T20 captain. The pacer has been removed after just one series which Pakistan lost 1-4 to New Zealand in January. The decision to reinstate Babar was taken after a unanimous recommendation from the Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) selection committee. "Following unanimous recommendation from the PCB's selection committee, Chairman PCB Mohsin Naqvi has appointed Babar Azam as white-ball (ODI and T20I) captain of the Pakistan men's cricket team," the PCB said in a media release. During a recent meeting in Lahore with PCB Chief Naqvi, Babar allegedly sought assurances about his tenure and asked to be appointed captain of the Test side as well. —AP

PHOTO: AFP

Mayank inspired by speed and thrill of jet planes

LUCKNOW, 31 MARCH

Speed thrills and excites India's latest fast-bowling sensation Mayank Yadav, a passion he cultivated since childhood when the sleek lines of jet planes, the awe-inspiring force of rockets, and the raw power of superbikes captured his imagination. The 21-year-old's 150kmph thunderbolts amazed one and all during his side Lucknow Super Giants' 21-run win over Punjab Kings here on Saturday. Mayank (3/27) stole the limelight with his searing pace. In the 12th over of Punjab's innings, he bowled the season's fastest ball at 155.8 kmph. His extra pace rattled Jonny Bairstow, Prabhsimran Singh, and Jitesh Sharma and led to PBKS' downfall. He consistently clocked 150kmph and above on the speedometer during his four-over spell, to be adjudged the player of the match. —PTI

Hardik wins HI Player of the Year award

NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Star Indian midfielders Hardik Singh and Salima Tete were on Sunday conferred with the Player of the Year awards in men and women categories respectively during the sixth Hockey India Annual Awards here.

Both the awards, in the name of legendary Balbir Singh Sr, carry a cash prize of Rs 25 lakh each. India vice-captain Hardik also bagged the Ajit Pal Singh Award for Midfielder of the Year, which carries a prize purse of Rs 5 lakh.

India captain Harmanpreet Singh won the Pargat Singh Award for Defender of the Year and took home Rs 5 lakh, while veteran custodian PR Sreejesh was honored with the Baljit Singh Award for Goalkeeper of the Year.

Dhanraj Pillay Award for Forward of the Year went to young striker Abhishek.

Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Women, Under-21) was bagged by Deepika Soreng, while the recognition in the men's division, which is in the name of former India drag-flicker Jugraj Singh, went to Araijeet Singh Hundal. Both the awards carry a prize money of Rs 10 lakh each.

The final award of the day, the prestigious Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award, which carries a prize money of Rs 30 lakh, was won by his son, Ashok Kumar.

The prize pool at the Hockey India awards this year was a whopping Rs 7.56 crore PHOTO: HOCKEY INDIA

This year, the total prize pool was Rs 7.56 crore.

"I guess the responsibility increases when you win any individual award but this is our profession," Hardik told PTI. "We live hockey for 300 days in a year and it is because of achieving these feats when some individual player gets such accolades, he or she should know that the entire team is trusting him or her. —PTI

DP WORLD TOUR

India's Ahlawat records his best-ever finish

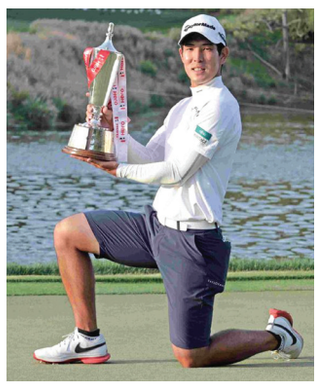
NEW DELHI, 31 MARCH

Gurugram, India's Veer Ahlawat recorded his best-ever finish in a DP World tour event, signing off tied second after carding a fine one-under 71 on the fourth and final day of the Hero Indian Open at the DLF Golf & Country Club here on Sunday.

The 28-year-old, who was five shots adrift of leader Keita Nakajima of Japan, produced a sensational eagle on the last hole to end the tournament with a four-day total of 275, four shots adrift of winner Nakajima.

Nakajima stayed calm and composed as he claimed his first DP World Tour title in emphatic style as a closing 73 handed him a four-shot wire-to-wire win.

The 23-year-old, playing his first full season on the Tour, thus became the fifth Japanese winner in DP World Tour history, and his victory, the seventh by a Japanese player, comes as part of a remarkable purple patch for his nation on the Tour.



Japan's Keita Nakajima poses with the Hero Indian Open Trophy PHOTO: PTI

Starting the day from sole sixth position, Ahlawat, who had finished tied fifth last Sunday at the Kolkata Challenge, shared the second position with Swedish Sebastian Soderberg and USA's Johannes Veerman with both shooting a matching 67 on day 4. —PTI

COMEBACK MAN PANT, WARNER HIT FIFTIES AS DC POST 191-5

V'PATNAM, 30 MARCH

Comeback man Rishabh Pant announced his arrival with a superb fifty after the opening duo of David Warner and Prithvi Shaw provided the foundation as Delhi Capitals posted a competitive 191 for 5 against Chennai Super Kings in their IPL game here on Sunday.

Opting to bat, Warner and Shaw shared a 93-run opening stand but the highlight of the day was Pant's 32-ball 51, which gave them the impetus in the end. Pant, who came into the tournament after recovering from a life-threatening road mishap in December 2022, belted four boundaries and three maximums for his first fifty in 15 months. The in-form Warner slammed five boundaries and three maximums during his 35-ball 52, his 110th T20 fifty, which equaled Chris Gayle's record of most fifty-plus scores in T20s.

Playing his first game this season, Shaw, who hasn't been able to live up to his immense talent, reminded everyone of his boundary-hitting skills, smashing two sixes and four boundaries in his 27-ball 43. —PTI

Collins topples Rybakina in Miami final to win WTA 1000 title

FLORIDA, 31 MARCH

Unseeded American Danielle Collins captured the highest-level title of her career after toppling No.4 seed Elena Rybakina 7-5, 6-3 to win the WTA 1000 Miami Open.

In an intense 2-hour and 2-minute display of power hitting by both players, 30-year-old Collins toughed out the win to take home her third career WTA singles title, her maiden WTA 1000 title, and her first title at any level since 2021, reports the WTA.

She won 17 of her last 21 matches, and with Saturday night's win, the American will move to World No. 22 as of next week.

Collins became the first American woman to take home the Miami Open title since Sloane Stephens in 2018. She is the sixth American woman overall to claim the crown, joining Martina Navratilova, Chris Evert, three-time champion Venus Williams, eight-time champion Serena Williams and Stephens.

She maintains her decision to retire at the end of this season, due to off-court health issues. She did not set a date for her farewell from professional tennis and plans to play at least until the US Open.

Collins topples Rybakina in Miami final PHOTO: AFP

"What a dream come true, to have played at the level that I have played consistently over the last two weeks. This has been such a journey for me. Thirty years old, and this was the final of my first WTA 1000, it has been a different journey than I think a lot of the stories that we are familiar with.

Collins revealed that winning a WTA 1000 was something in her plans for this last season, and the fact that she will not be playing professional tennis.

"I think part of the reason why I played so well and did a good job today was because I had that mentality of, like, I'm going to enjoy every minute of this. This is my last year, this is my last season, and these are some of my final events. I want to remember these moments," she added. —AP

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man United lucky to draw at Brentford in dramatic finish

LONDON, 31 MARCH

Under Alex Ferguson, Manchester United were famous for scoring decisive winning goals late in matches.

There is nothing comparable under the helm of current coach Erik ten Hag, who witnessed his players relinquish an undeserved lead deep in stoppage time and draw at Brentford 1-1 in the English Premier League on Saturday.

Following yet another uninspired display that further dented the club's Champions League hopes, Manchester United were in sixth place, eight points behind fifth-placed Tottenham.

Brentford players kept United goalkeeper Andre Onana busy he made four saves and hit the woodwork four times. Totally against the run of the play, United took the lead in stoppage time through substitute Mason Mount's effort past Mark Flekken. With victory in sight, United conceded three minutes later when Ivan Toney cut the ball back inside the area for the unmarked Kristoffer Ajer, who bagged his second goal in two matches to level. "When you go 1-0 up right at the end you want to try and hang onto that," Mount said. "If you look at the game overall it wasn't to our standard. We know that. When you score at the death you think you can maybe hang on. But maybe we didn't deserve it." Brentford battered United all night long but a cruel lack of efficiency prevented the Bees from a repeat of their 4-0 home win against the United in August 2022 in Ten Hag's second match in charge.

Manchester United were famous for scoring decisive winning goals late in matches PHOTO: AFP

- There is nothing comparable under the helm of current coach Erik ten Hag, who witnessed his players relinquish an undeserved lead deep in stoppage time and draw at Brentford 1-1 in the English Premier League on Saturday.

Brentford, which moved five points clear of the relegation zone, had 31 attempts at goal before finding the net. —AP